

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XXII.

RESCUER AND RESCUED.

IT seemed to be a perilous situation: lying on the boat there, alone and insensible, without certainty of rescue. But help had come: and when Miss Winter opened her eyes to consciousness, the first sight she awoke to was the face of Edward Conroy, bent tenderly over her. Kneeling on one knee, he was chafing her hands gently; and at a little distance stood two of the Easterby boatmen.

"You are better now," said Mr. Conroy.

"Yes, I am better now," Ella repeated mechanically. Her mind just yet only recognised one fact, that Conroy was by her side. He assisted her to rise. When she stood up and looked round, all the events of the afternoon flashed across her mind in a moment. What happy accident had brought Conroy, of all people in the world, to her rescue? But it was not a time to ask questions: that could be done afterwards.

"The sooner we get ashore the better," said Conroy. "Are you well enough to venture?"

"Quite well enough," answered Ella with a rush of tears. "A little while ago I thought I should never set foot on shore again."

"But what became of the boat that brought you to the wreck?—and what has become of Mr. Stone?"

"The rope that held the boat became unfastened and the tide carried it away," she slowly answered after a long pause.

But Hubert Stone?—she mentally asked herself, what could have become of him: was he below still? Conroy repeated the question. He had heard from Mrs. Toynbee that it was Stone who had rowed Ella to the wreck.

"He—he went into the cabin," said Ella, shrinking from speaking too openly. "He went down first of all to look for George Petherton, and found he was not on board. He was below when I fainted."

"We'll soon see after him. You can be getting into the boat again," he added to the men.

The cabin door had been broken open: by Stone, of course. Conroy only supposed it had been done in the wreck, and descended the stairs. Presently he returned.

"Stone is not below. He is certainly not on board. I have looked everywhere."

"But he must be on board," said Ella: who did not wish to leave him to his fate, although he had not behaved well to her. "He had no means of getting away. The little boat was gone."

"Unless he swam on shore," suggested Conroy. "A good swimmer could do it."

One of the men looked up to speak. "Hubert Stone is one of the best swimmers we have, sir. The young lady knows it. He must ha' swum after the boat."

"Look here," interposed the other man: "as we were nearing the brig here, I saw something moving through the water a goodish distance off; but whether it was a man, or what it was, I couldn't make out."

"It must have been Stone that you saw," said Mr. Conroy. "In any case he is not here. He must have gone to get help for you," he added to Ella: "a brave fellow!—though he had the tide all in his favour."

That it was Stone the man had seen there could be little doubt of. Conroy helped Ella into the boat and the men rowed away.

It was almost dusk now. The great black bank of cloud was still climbing slowly up from the sea, and had shut out half the sky. The wind had risen considerably during the last half-hour, and the tide was rolling in in huge sullen masses of blue-green water, with here and there a white-topped wave.

"We shall have plenty of dirty weather before morning," remarked one boatman to the other.

Ella and Conroy sat in the stern of the boat. He had wrapped his ulster round her to protect her from the wind. Also, he had taken possession of one of her hands and she made no attempt to withdraw it. When he had her heart already, why should she refuse him possession of her hand?

Ella shut her eyes and tried to realise her happiness. Oh, the difference that one short half-hour had made! She could hardly believe this, the sitting there, to be more than a blissful dream.

"What strange chance was it that brought you here to day?" she said to him at last. "Did you drop down from the sky? How e'se did you come?"

"I came by a very slow train that was an hour longer on the road than it might have been," answered Conroy. "My employers ordered me abroad yesterday. Not very far this time. Only to Spain."

"For long?"

"I may be away three months, or I may be away six. It was impossible for me to start until I had seen you again."

There was something in his tone, as he spoke these words, that thrilled Ella's heart and made her cheeks flush rosy-red. She was glad that it was too dark for him to see her face.

"I walked from the station direct to the Hall," resumed Conroy, after a pause. "Mrs. Toynbee told me where you had gone. She was beginning to be a little uneasy at your long stay on board. Not much so, only in her placid way. 'Miss Winter's movements cannot always be calculated beforehand,' she said to me."

Conroy spoke in imitation of Mrs. Toynbee's mincing method of speaking. Ella laughed. "I believe she sets me down in her own mind as the most erratic and eccentric young woman it has ever been her fortune to live with."

"What a pity you are not more commonplace. She would like you so very much better," said Conroy. "However—though Mrs. Toynbee might be satisfied to account for your absence after her easy fashion, it did not satisfy me. I walked down to the village and enquired among the boatmen whether any of them had seen you return. Several of them had seen you go out to the wreck but no one had seen you come back, and they could not think what was keeping you. Then I hesitated no longer. I hired a boat and got these two worthy fellows to accompany me. When we were about half a mile from shore we saw a bright tongue of flame leap suddenly up on the wreck: we knew that you must be in distress, and the men redoubled their efforts at the oars. The rest you know."

Conroy felt the hand that he was holding press his fingers softly.

"I had given up all hope of rescue," said Ella. "It must have been the special hand of Providence that brought you down to-day!"

"Ay. All the same, it was excessively careless of Hubert Stone not to make sure that the boat was fast; unpardonably so. I wonder what he thinks of himself?"

Ella made no response. Conroy judged from her silence that the matter had too thoroughly frightened her to be a pleasant topic of conversation: so he did not again allude to it. Stone had no doubt done his best to remedy it, Conroy thought, by swimming off to get succour—and so he was content to leave it.

What a thankful heart was Ella's when she stepped out of the boat on to the sandy beach! She had been mercifully snatched from what at one time seemed certain death, and she was profoundly grateful to Him "whose mercy endureth for ever."

The villagers had seen the signal on the wreck, and men, women,

and children hurried down to the shore. They crowded round Ella when she stepped out of the boat and greeted her with low, heartfelt cheers. Then she broke down. Her tears came hot and fast, and for a little while she could not say a word to any of them. A fly was soon obtained from the inn, and Ella was driven to the Hall. As they neared it, she looked at Conroy, who sat opposite to her.

"Please not to say anything to Mrs. Toynbee about what has occurred," she said, "or that you had to fetch me from the wreck. She will hear it to-morrow, of course; but really I feel that I could not bear questioning to-night."

And most adroitly did Conroy parry Mrs. Toynbee's remarks. The row on the sea had been longer than Miss Winter had expected, he said, and she was very tired.

Little sleep did Ella get that night. However tired she might be, her mind was intensely awake and excited; and the cold grey dawn was stealing into her room before she closed her eyes in forgetfulness. All through the night the wind blew in great gusts round the old house, the rain smote like whips on window and casement, and the thunderous beat of the sea on the low, sandy beach, grew louder and more loud as the dark hours slowly dragged themselves away. It was a great storm: and one inmate of the Hall at any rate, apart from Miss Winter, had her rest broken by it.

This was a stranger, named Betsy Tucker, who had entered the Hall as an additional servant a week or two before, the place having been procured for her by Mrs. Keen. The mother of this young woman had once lived at Nullington; she had recently died, and the daughter wrote to Mrs. Keen, who had been a companion of her mother's in early life, to ask if she could find her a good situation; upon which the landlady spoke for her to Miss Winter, hearing that a third housemaid was needed at the Hall.

The girl, who knew nothing of the superstitious reports rife at Heron Dyke, slept in a room by herself. On this night she could not get to sleep for the noise of the wind: suddenly, during its pauses, she heard, or thought she heard, footsteps pacing the corridor outside her door. Much startled, the girl held her breath, and became convinced she was not mistaken: she heard them distinctly. They came and went several times, once or twice they were accompanied by a low moan. Betsy lay working herself into a fever.

She could bear this in the dark no longer; so she struck a match and lighted her candle. Then, as she was sitting up in bed listening to the footsteps, she heard them stop close to her door, and saw the handle of the door move: some one was turning it from the outside. For the moment she forgot that she had locked it; she screamed aloud; and, throwing her arms out of bed in her terror, upset the candle and was left in darkness.

"You may be sure there was no more sleep for me all night,"

said Betsy, when relating this to her fellow servants the following morning. "But now—who could have been there? I heard the steps and I heard the moans, and I saw the handle of the door turn : it's as true as that I am here to tell you."

Such was the story she whispered. Her awe-struck listeners thought of Katherine Keen, but not one of them mentioned the name. Betsy slept alone, and they would not frighten her unnecessarily.

Early in the day came tidings that the *Seamew* was no longer to be seen. As predicted, the brig had gone to pieces during the gale. Ella shuddered when the news was told her : could it be that Hubert Stone was still on board? Several planks and some broken spars were washed ashore in the course of the following tide.

The moment Ella had awakened that morning, the warning spoken by Hubert rang in her ears : "What you hold, you hold by fraud : a dozen words from me, and Heron Dyke would know you as its mistress no more." Surely, she reasoned, they could be the words of no other than a madman !

Nevertheless, they haunted her. What—she could not help asking herself—what if they were true?—what then?—*was* there any hidden secret?—any fraud connected with her succession to the property? She could not think it possible. Still, do what she might, she did not get them out of her mind. Last night, in the joy of her deliverance from a cruel death, and under the glad influence of Conroy's presence, she had thought but little of them ; but this morning, when her mind was fresh and clear, they were branded on her memory as if with a red-hot iron.

Nothing was seen of Hubert at the Hall that day, and Miss Winter made no enquiry respecting him. She thought it not unlikely, after what had passed between them, that he would have the grace to absent himself for a little time. Conroy had spoken of the keg of spirits and the horn drinking-cup he saw below—in fact, she had seen them herself ; she felt little doubt that Hubert had imbibed some, which in a degree might account for his ill-behaviour, and that he was now ashamed of himself. It would be impossible to retain him as steward at the Hall, but Miss Winter could recommend him elsewhere. Meanwhile she did not intend to speak of what had passed, but to bury it in oblivion. It was not a pleasant thing in any way, either to speak or to think of.

Mr. Conroy was at Heron Dyke betimes on the morning after the visit to the wreck. He was anxious to hear that Ella had suffered in no way from her adventure : at least, that was what he told Mrs. Toynbee, for Miss Winter was not yet downstairs when he reached the Hall ; but there may have been some other motive in his mind of which he did not choose to speak. What a glad light leapt into Ella's eyes when she walked into the room and saw who was there ! Conroy's earnest face brightened as if with a sudden burst of sun-

shine, while he took her hand for a moment and enquired after her health. Truth to tell, Ella had a slight headache this morning, but not for worlds would she have owned to it. They sat and talked about the gale and other matters, but never alluded to the adventure on the wreck, Mrs. Toynbee interposing one of her little common-places now and again; and so the time wore on till luncheon.

"Won't you go out for a short walk with me, Miss Winter?" asked Conroy, as they rose from the meal. "You have no idea how delightful the park is after last night's rain."

"Delightful!" exclaimed Mrs. Toynbee. "Why, the footpaths must be in a complete puddle."

"So they are, madam. But, none the less, I maintain that the park this morning is delightful."

"And there's still enough wind to almost carry you away; and the rain may recommence at any moment!" persisted the lady.

"Those are facts it would be useless to dispute," rejoined Conroy equably.

"On such a day I am sure Miss Winter would be far better indoors."

"Nay, I think it just the day to be out," said Ella, with a blush and a smile, "and I have thick boots, you know, Mrs. Toynbee. A little wind, a little sunshine, and the possibility of a shower: what more could any reasonable creature wish for? Mr. Conroy, I shall be ready in three minutes."

Mrs. Toynbee shrugged her shoulders in mild protest, but she said no more.

The paths in the park were certainly very sloppy and the wind when they faced it almost took away their breath, but what cared those two for such trifles? they but served to enhance the charms of their walk. Conroy took a turning that led to the shore. "Not that way, please," said Ella, with a slight shudder. She did not care to look upon the sea again at present; so they turned their faces another way, finding a dry and sheltered walk, where they were free from the impertinences of the wind, by the edge of the plantation of young larches which covered a piece of rising ground to the left of the Hall. Here they paced backwards and forwards for upwards of an hour.

The rain last night had washed the atmosphere so that even the most distant objects looked sharp and clearly defined. Away over the sea, the sun streamed down through a rift in the grey, low-hanging clouds, that widened out one minute till a glimpse of blue sky could be seen beyond it, and the next contracted its fleecy walls again till nothing was left save a thin shaft of blinding light that smote the water like a golden spear. Faint resinous odours were wafted fitfully from the plantation; in the hollows of the footpaths tiny pools of rain-water shivered in the cool September wind.

Ella seemed in a peculiarly happy mood. Why she should be so

she could not have explained even to herself, for had not Conroy told her that he was about to go away for an indefinite length of time, and was not the echo of Hubert Stone's mysterious words ringing in her memory? But so it was. She could no more account for her gladness than a child can for its fondness for play. Had she any faintest premonition, had her heart secretly warned her, that a momentous instant was at hand? Be that as it may, Ella found fifty different things to talk about, and seemed nervously anxious not to let the conversation flag for a moment. She had all sorts of questions to ask him about Spain, the country and the people, as though she had never read a book about it in her life. She hoped that Conroy would not run into any unnecessary danger, and now and then at intervals he must send her a little sketch of some place that he had visited, just to prove to her that he was still alive. She had often had an idea that she should like to learn Spanish, and had been told that it was nearly as musical as Italian. She would buy a grammar and dictionary at once; it would be a capital occupation for the long evenings of the coming winter; and when Mr. Conroy should return in spring she should doubtless be able to greet him in the choicest Castilian.

Suddenly Ella paused in her talk to stand still. The clock over the Hall stables was striking the hour. "I did not suppose it was so late," she exclaimed. "I should have thought that the old clock was an hour fast but that I know how painfully accurate it always is. We had better return. After what happened yesterday, Mrs. Toynbee may be sending the bellman round the village to cry me as lost."

"Give me ten minutes more and then we will go," said the young man. "Who can tell when we shall see each other again?"

Ella tacitly assented, and they took a turn or two in silence. All her high spirits seemed suddenly to have deserted her.

"Before leaving you I have a few words to say to you: it was to say them that I have come all the way from London,"—and Conroy took one of her hands in his as he spoke thus, even as he had taken it last evening in the boat. Ella's heart gave a great bound, she drew in her breath with a half sigh and trembled from head to foot.

"Ella—may I dare to call you so?—I could not go away without telling you how I love you, without telling you that I have loved you from the moment I first set eyes on you that evening last year at Mrs. Carlyon's, and that I can never cease to love you while I live! I could not go away—Ella, I *could* not—without asking you whether I may come and claim you as my wife when I return."

He held both her hands by this time and was gazing down fondly into her face. She had turned very pale when he first began to speak, but by the time he had done two blush-roses burned in her cheeks. Tremors of love, and joy, and happiness unspeakable

thrilled her heart. She was standing with downcast eyes, and she stood thus for a little while after he had ceased speaking. Her breath came and went quickly, the tears were rising. Another moment and she had lifted her glance to his. Her lips were quivering with emotion, but from her eyes, love—love not to be mistaken for anything else—looked out at Conroy through a mist of tears. Not one word did she say; there was no necessity to say it. That one look told Conroy all he cared to know. He folded her in his arms, he pressed his lips to hers, he whispered words in her ears sacred to her alone.

As they were walking slowly back arm in arm through the park, Conroy broke the thrilling silence. "Do you know, *cara mia*, what the world will call me? It will brand me as a fortune-hunter, and say that I should never have sought you for my wife had you not been the mistress of Heron Dyke."

The words sent a shock through her, like a dart. Was she the mistress of Heron Dyke? She was not, if there were truth in what Hubert Stone had declared to her. Her lover's constancy might be put to the test before long in a way he little dreamed of now. "You can afford to smile at anything the world may choose to say," she answered. "So can I, so long as I have vanity enough to think that you care for me, for myself alone."

"But that I had the fear of your broad acres before my eyes I should have spoken to you long ere this," he answered. "Had your uncle been a poor man, or you not his heiress, I should have asked you at his hands last autumn."

How sweet the words sounded to her—how true was their ring!—and after what that other man had said!

"Suppose that when you return from Spain, you should find that I am no longer mistress of Heron Dyke!" she cried impulsively. "Suppose you should find that, by some misfortune or other, I am poor instead of rich? What would you say then to your intended wife?"

"I should say, 'The fact has made me one of the happiest fellows alive.' I should say, 'Let us marry at once and have a humble little home of our own.' I should say, 'I am glad that your riches have taken to themselves wings; it is only fit and proper that a man should work for his wife.' I don't think," he added, "that I could love you more than I do now, but somehow you might perhaps seem closer to me if you came to me as the beggar-maid went to King Cophetua."

Ella sighed. It was happiness to hear him talk thus; and yet his words brought to her a sting of pain. How glad she would be to endow him with every worldly good—and who seemed so fit to be the master of Heron Dyke? And yet, perhaps—who could say?—he might love her all the better if she went to him in a cotton gown, with a simple flower in her hair.

"But what makes you talk as if Heron Dyke and you were about to part company?" he presently asked.

"Perhaps we may be: I cannot tell," she answered, a cloud as of trouble passing over her face.

Conroy saw it, and looked perplexed. He bit his lip.

"Pardon me, Ella, but I do not see how anything of that kind could come to pass. Your uncle was too shrewd a man not to take every proper precaution in a matter so gravely important."

Ella did not answer for a few moments, and when she spoke it was with hesitation. "Might there not be such a thing as a flaw in the title?"

Conroy started slightly. "In his title, do you mean? I cannot think of anything more improbable. Have you any reason for suggesting this?"

"Here we are at home," said Ella hurriedly, for they had reached it. "I cannot tell you anything more, and you must please not ask me to. In any case, whatever happens, I trust that I shall be enabled to do my duty."

"That I am sure you will always do," responded Conroy, warmly. "Remember," he added in a low tone, "that in good fortune or evil fortune my love for you can never change."

They were standing under the porch, not yet having rung. She looked up with a shy sweet smile as he spoke. The opportunity was too tempting to be resisted; he might not have another one for ever so long. He was an audacious man in many ways, and before Ella was aware, his arms were round her and his lips pressed to hers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NOTHING VENTURE, NOTHING WIN.

MARIA KETTLE returned from Leamington in mourning. Mrs. Page was dead and had left Maria two thousand pounds. "Better than nothing of course," grumbled the Vicar; "but she might just as well have made it three or four thousand while she was about it." He had always thought she would. Maria was truly glad to get back home again, and she told nobody about her little fortune. She and Ella met like sisters who had been long parted. What a number of things they had to say to each other, yet each shrank from speaking of that which lay closest to their hearts. Maria said nothing about her semi-engagement to Philip Cleeve, while Ella did not mention Edward Conroy. It seemed such a little while ago since they were mutually affirming that they would never marry—or at least not for many years to come; and yet, after all their grand resolutions, when put to the test, they had proved no stronger-minded than the rest of their sex. Each felt slightly ashamed to think of all this; yet, strange to

say, neither of them would have exchanged her present bondage for that past freedom. But a great blow was about to fall on Maria.

The more the Reverend Mr. Kettle puzzled over the loss of his purse, the more inclined he was to connect Philip Cleeve with it in some way. He did not absolutely say to himself that Philip had taken the purse, but it was strange how the young man's image always came into his mind in connection with the loss. It may be that he owed this feeling to Dr. Downes.

He and Dr. Downes, being fellow sufferers, for the Doctor had never heard more of his gold snuff-box, had got into the habit of talking with one another. Talking begets talking, and perhaps the old Doctor said more than he had meant to say. Anyway, one day the Vicar heard for the first time about Philip's frequent visits to the billiard-room of the Rose and Crown, and about the high play with Lord Camberley and others that went on at the Lilacs.

"What a young idiot he must be!" exclaimed the indignant Vicar: and Dr. Downes nodded assent.

"And if there's anything between Cleeve and your daughter, as I fancy there is," added the old man, "I should put my veto on it—at least for the present. Master Philip has fallen into bad ways, that's quite evident, and even if these ugly suspicions about him should turn out to have no foundation in fact, he ought to alter very much before he is fit to marry so nice a girl as Maria."

The Vicar ruffled his white hair with his fingers, and could not help admitting that the Doctor's view was the right one. There had been a sort of tacit agreement between himself and Lady Cleeve that one day the two young people should marry, provided they cared sufficiently for each other: and—and he believed they did care. It grieved him to see his old friend's son going so far astray; but his duty to his daughter was paramount, and other considerations must give way to it.

After Maria's return from Leamington, the Vicar spoke to her, entering upon the subject abruptly.

"Maria, I hope there is no foolish engagement between you and Philip Cleeve?"

Maria's heart began to beat. "There is no engagement, papa."

"But something has passed between you, has it not? He has said something to you, eh?"

"Philip certainly spoke to me before I went to Leamington; but, papa, there is not an engagement."

"Should he speak to you again you must give him no encouragement; none whatever. Understand that, Maria."

Her poor heart was throbbing fitfully. "But—but why, papa?"

The Vicar told her why. Of the billiards at the Rose and Crown, and the high play at the Lilacs. "There were other things," he added, "which he should not speak of"—meaning, of course, the Doctor's gold snuff-box, and his own purse.

"It seems to me that he must be becoming a practised gambler, Maria," wound up Mr. Kettle, "playing as he does with rich men like Camberley and Lennox. They can afford it; Philip can't. Putting all that aside, he is not progressing in his profession; so what likelihood is there of his making a home to take a wife to?"

"Mr. Tiplady has some intention of taking him into partnership; Philip told me so."

"I take it that Tiplady is far too shrewd a man to do anything of the kind."

Maria sighed. "We may be misjudging him, papa."

"We are not misjudging him. Don't I tell you there are other reasons why you should have nothing more to do with Philip?—matters which I do not choose to speak of openly."

"It seems rather hard, papa, that I should be asked to condemn Philip without knowing what he has done."

"Good gracious, Maria, have I not given you reasons enough? Could he become your husband without a radical alteration in his mode of life? As for the other matters I hinted at, the less said about them, at present, the better. I hope with all my heart that things may not turn out so bad as they seem."

"Then all Philip's promises to me before I went away have proved of no avail," mourned Maria to herself. "He still goes to the Lilacs, he still frequents the billiard-room. Why has he not more strength of mind? And what are those mysterious hints which papa threw out of something still worse? Oh! Philip, Philip!"

That there must be some weighty cause, apart from what she knew, to make her easy and tolerant father speak so severely, Maria felt assured of. She never thought to rebel at the mandate; but it seemed to her that Philip grew all the dearer to her heart.

She had a speedy proof that the Vicar was very much in earnest. He gave orders in the household that whenever Mr. Cleeve called he was not to be admitted. Philip did call; again and again; and at last he understood that the door was closed to him. It made Philip very angry, and he set himself to waylay Maria out of doors.

One morning he met her suddenly in a pretty green lane just outside the town, and had accosted her before Maria well knew he was there.

"Good morning, Maria," he said, stopping her and holding out his hand. What could she do but put out hers in return?

"Good morning," she rejoined.

"I was sorry to hear of Mrs. Page's death; it must have been a mournful time for you. You have been back a week, have you not?"

"About that."

"And I have called at the Vicarage nearly every day, only to be denied to you. Mr. Kettle is not to be seen, and Miss Kettle is not

to be seen, are the answers I get. Of course I can only conclude that I am no longer welcome. Now, Maria, what is the meaning of it?"

Maria was thoroughly distressed. She knew not what to say: tears sprang to her eyes. How dear he was to her! How his very voice thrilled her as he spoke! It seemed like a taste of heaven to hear it again.

"Papa thought it best that you should not come to the Vicarage for a little while," she murmured—and the words seemed nearly to choke her.

"But why? What have I done? Why am I to be tabooed in this way?"

"Papa has heard—has heard things," stammered Maria. "He says you are frequently to be seen at the billiard-table; he has heard that you are addicted to high play with men like Lord Camberley and Captain Lennox. And—and he says they may be able to afford it, but you cannot—which, of course, is true. Oh, Philip! have you forgotten the promises you made to me before I went to Leamington?"

Philip changed colour, and bit his lip. He began tracing some hieroglyphic on the gravel with his cane.

"Papa asked me whether there was any engagement between us," continued Maria. "I told him that there was not, but that you had spoken to me before I went away. He then said that everything between us must be broken off, at least for the present; you best know why, yourself, Philip."

"That I have been weak and foolish, Maria, no one knows better than myself," he candidly answered. "But I don't think I have deserved to be treated quite so harshly."

It was on the tip of Maria's tongue to say, Papa seems to have something against you more than I have mentioned, though he would not tell me what: but after a moment's thought she stopped herself. "Papa is not in the habit of treating anyone with undue harshness," she remarked aloud.

"I think he is harsh to me. Why, Maria—but perhaps I had better see your father himself and have this matter out with him," he broke off in his usual impulsive style.

Maria shook her head: she knew that his seeing her father would bring forth nothing—except unpleasantness.

"It would be of no use, Philip," she answered, sadly. "Papa would only say to you what I have said—putting it perhaps in stronger terms."

Philip went into a passion. "What right has Mr. Kettle to set himself up as a censor of my morals and conduct?" asked he with a heightened colour.

"No right at all, I suppose, in one sense of the word, nor does he profess to do so," was Maria's grave reply. "But one thing he has a

right to do : to think of me and of my welfare. Don't you see that, Philip ? ”

Philip fumed and frowned, and slashed at an unoffending nettle with his cane. They had been walking slowly onward in this unfrequented lane, where they were free to talk without observation.

“ Am I to consider our engagement at an end ? ” demanded Philip, after a few moments' silence.

“ There has been no engagement, as you are well aware,” returned Maria in a low voice.

“ You know quite well what I mean. Am I to look upon it that all is at an end between us ? ”

“ Papa says so. He thinks it will be best so.”

“ And you, Maria ? ”

A moment's pause ; then in a very low voice : “ I think as papa thinks. You know I *must*, Philip.”

Again they walked slowly on, without speaking. Presently Philip resumed.

“ That I have been thoughtless and foolish, I have already admitted to you, Maria ; but I verily believe that matters would never have gone so far with me had there been an engagement between us. I should then have had something definite to look forward to—some hopeful end to work for. As it was, what you said to me at our last interview seemed to take the heart out of me : it did, Maria. You would not even let me write to you. I seemed to lose my anchorage altogether.”

“ But oh, Philip—is not that a very weak confession to make ? ”

“ It is. I grant it.”

“ And after all your promises.”

“ I have not forgotten them. The truth is, Maria,” he burst out passionately, “ you are the only person in the world who can save me from myself. When I am with you I am strong, when I am away from you I am as unstable as water. Were you my wife, you could mould me as you would : were you even my promised wife, I should be a very different man.”

Maria had no words at command, but she gave him a glance out of her tearful eyes which conveyed a world of love and tenderness.

“ I will make no more promises,” continued Philip, with a bitter laugh. “ In my case they only recoil on my own head. I will abide by your father's behest for the present, and keep at a distance. But only for the present, mind. I shall still look upon you as my future wife. Nobody can deny me that much.”

Maria sighed. She felt that he was not meeting this trouble quite right on the whole.

“ Wait a little while, Maria, and you shall see what you shall see. I hope to be able to prove both to you and your father that—but, no, I said that I would make no more promises,” he abruptly broke off again, “ and I will not.”

They were at the end of the lane. Before them was a gate, with a stile, leading into some fields and high grounds that overlooked the town. Maria stopped. "I must go back. I have come too far already," she said. Philip took both her hands and gazed fondly into her eyes. Then, before she was aware of his intention, or had time to offer any resistance, his arms were round her, she was pressed to his heart, and one burning kiss was left upon her lips. Next moment, without a word, he was gone, vaulting lightly over the stile and away into the meadows beyond. With hot cheeks and a beating heart, Maria retraced her steps to the town.

"What was it that she would see by waiting a little while?" she presently began to ask herself. Philip had spoken with significant meaning.

The two hundred pounds won by Philip Cleeve on Patchwork, at the Newmarket Spring Meeting, had to a great extent recouped him for his gambling losses. But some months had passed away since then, and his capital had again been dipped into pretty deeply. For one thing, he was less frugal in his habits than of old. His mother's allowance no longer sufficed to find him in clothes and pocket-money. His tailor's and bootmaker's bills were twice as heavy as they used to be, and of late there was no more fashionably dressed young man in Nullington than Philip Cleeve. At one time he had been content to play billiards for sixpence a game, but nothing less than half a crown a game would do for him now. He went to the Lilacs once a week, sometimes oftener, and although he no longer joined the card-table so frequently as in those earlier days, preferring to talk with Mrs. Ducie or turn over her music, yet he could not keep aloof from play altogether, and it was no unfrequent thing for him to find himself minus ten or fifteen sovereigns when he reached home. In short, by the beginning of September his capital had again shown a very serious deficit. More than once Captain Lennox said to him: "What a pity it is that you did not lay every sovereign you could scrape together on Patchwork. You will never have such a chance again." And Philip agreed with the Captain that it was a pity.

One day at the Lilacs, a little while previous to this present time, Philip found a printed paper on the table, which, for want of something better to do, he took up and glanced over. It proved to be a prospectus of the *Hermadad Silver Mining Company, Colorado*. Philip was surprised to see the name of his host, Captain Lennox, among the list of directors. "Why, Lennox," he said, "I was not aware that you went in for anything of this kind."

"It helps to kill time and gives me an excuse for running up to town now and then," answered Lennox. "Besides, these things bring one in contact with a lot of men who may prove useful."

"I presume that the *Hermadad Mining Company* is a prosperous concern?"

"My dear fellow, as yet it is in its babyhood: it has only been launched a few weeks. That it will prove a very prosperous thing, I never for one moment doubted; otherwise I should not have allowed my name to appear to it, nor should I have invested in it so much of my spare capital."

"Colorado seems a long way to send one's spare capital to," remarked Philip.

"A long way in this era of telegraphy? Pooh! There's no such thing as distance now-a-days. Besides, the board has its own expert out there—a very clever young mining engineer—and his reports may be thoroughly relied upon. We know pretty well what we are about."

Philip was of opinion that the Captain knew pretty well what he was about in most of the concerns of life. "I suppose that every now and then one of these silver mines really does turn out to be a gold mine in one sense of the phrase," he observed.

"Now and then!" said Lennox, with a lifting of his eyebrows. "All I know is that there are two mines within a little distance of ours which are paying their lucky proprietors between thirty and forty per cent., and I know of no reason why the Hermandad should be poorer than its neighbours. All we want is more capital for its proper working; and that we are now about to raise. There will be no difficulty in doing *that*."

Mrs. Ducie came in, and nothing more was said. But Philip's dreams that night were all about the Hermandad mine; and it ran far more in his thoughts next day at the office than did his duties.

Two days later Philip saw Lennox again. "By-the-by, about those Hermandad shares?" he said. "What are they each? I don't see them quoted in the Money Article."

Captain Lennox smiled. "No, you don't see them in the market—at least so far as the general public is concerned; they are too choice a commodity to be there. We—I and my co-directors—intend to keep them for ourselves and our friends."

"What are they?" repeated Philip.

"Twenty pounds each. Five pounds payable on allotment and another five pounds in two months' time."

"Leaving ten pounds to be called up later on."

"There will be no further calls: the first and second will amply suffice for all expenses. Our profits will begin almost from the very day the machinery gets into working order."

Metaphorically speaking, Philip's mouth was watering. Thirty per cent.! The words had rung like sweet music in his memory ever since he heard them. "I suppose that even if an outsider were desirous of investing a little spare cash in your precious shares, there would be no chance of his being able to do so?" he said.

"Um—well—I daresay there are still a few left. Are you speaking for yourself?"

"I've got that two hundred by me that I won on Patchwork," answered Philip. "I might venture to speculate with that."

"To be sure you might," nodded Lennox. "I am going up to town the day after to-morrow: if you like, I will see what I can do for you. Just as you please, you know, Cleeve: I have no interest in your decision one way or the other."

"I am aware of that. It is very good of you. Let me see: Twenty shares at five pounds a share would be a hundred pounds. That would leave me the other hundred to pay the second call with."

The Captain laughed—a little contemptuously, Philip thought.

"You are indeed a timid speculator," he said. "In these matters my motto is, 'Nothing venture, nothing win.' In your place I should invest the two hundred pounds right off. But of course you know your own business best."

Philip coloured and stammered. "You are certain that there is no likelihood of a third call being made, Lennox?"

"As certain as I am of anything in this uncertain world," was the answer. "And then, you have always the option of getting out of your bargain by selling."

"Well, I will think of it," decided Philip, "and see you again before you go."

He did think of it, and the thought dazzled him. The end of it was that he put a cheque for two hundred pounds in Lennox's hands half an hour before that gentleman started for London.

An anxious and feverish time for Philip was that which followed. His sunny, easy-going disposition led him to look on the bright side of most things, but there were times and seasons, generally during the lonely hours of darkness, when he thought with a dread sinking of the heart of what he had done. The second call would go a long way towards exhausting his remaining capital, and should the mine, after all, turn out a failure, he would be a ruined man.

But more often his thoughts flowed in a brighter channel. The Hermandad shares would go up—up; as he had heard of other mining shares going up. At the proper moment he would sell out and realise his capital. Then with a swelling heart he would go to the Vicar and say to him: "I have come to ask your daughter's hand in marriage. I am about to become Tiplady's partner, and I have a home to take my wife to, equal to the one she is leaving." What a sweet revenge it would be on Mr. Kettle's harshness!

CHAPTER XXIV.

HUBERT STONE'S RETURN.

MR. CONROY departed for London immediately after that momentous walk with Ella Winter, which would never be forgotten by either of them. There was a last pressure of the hands, a last look into

each other's eyes, and he was gone. She wished their engagement not to be spoken of at present, and he willingly complied.

The days wore on. When three had passed, and there came no tidings of Hubert Stone, old Aaron grew somewhat perplexed. What could he mean by absenting himself? That so good a swimmer and strong a man, as Hubert was, had failed to reach the shore, no one who knew him entertained any fear of. Where was he, then?

On the fourth day Aaron presented himself before his mistress, who was alone in her own sitting-room.

"No news yet of that scapegrace lad, ma'am!" he said, a quaver of trouble in his voice. "He must have swum off to get succour for you, Miss Ella, as it was his duty to do: but heaven alone knows where he's got to."

Ella smiled. She believed Hubert to be perfectly safe and quite able to take care of himself, but she wished to set the old retainer's doubts at rest.

"Be at ease, Aaron. After a feat like that your nephew would naturally need some recreation; I daresay he has gone away for a few days' holiday. We shall see him back again shortly."

"What I can't get out of my head is this: that he might have been left on board. And oh, my dear young mistress, that night the wreck went to pieces in the gale!"

"He was not left on board, Aaron; rely upon that: and one of the boatmen, you know, saw him swimming towards the shore. It must have been he; nobody else was out. Believe me," impressively added Miss Winter, "there is not, so far as I believe, the slightest cause for alarm. Hubert is gone away, perhaps on business, combining that at least with pleasure, and you will soon have him at home again. Such is my opinion, and I have good grounds for it."

Aaron felt reassured. He acknowledged that it might be so. "Not but what the careless young jackanapes ought to have told me before he went, Miss Ella!" he urged.

"Or to write to you," replied Ella.

But as more days passed on and Hubert neither came nor sent, other people as well as Aaron began to wonder; and the question, what could have become of him, made the chief topic of the neighbourhood. That he had undertaken this bout of swimming to obtain succour for Miss Winter, none disputed, and Ella did not undeceive them. The real facts, there could be little doubt, being these. Upon Hubert's forcing the closed door and finding Miss Winter senseless on the deck, he must at the same time have seen the little boat coming to her rescue. Fearful that her first word might be to denounce him, and probably feeling heartily ashamed of himself, he plunged into the sea to swim ashore, not choosing to stay and face the scene.

But on what part of the shore had he landed, and where could he be staying? What had become of him? Aaron and his wife grew strangely uneasy: if anything were detaining him, business or else, surely he would write, they said to one another.

"He has not got so much as a clean shirt with him—or a collar," lamented Dorothy. "What *can* he do without them?"

"Oh, drat the shirts and collars!" retorted Aaron, not less crusty and contradictory than usual. "As if he couldn't buy himself things o' that sort!"

There came a relief to their fears. Dr. Jago, hearing that the old people were becoming seriously alarmed, avowed that Hubert Stone had got safely to land that night, after his swimming-feat, and had made his way at once to his house. He put on dry clothes, some things of the young man's happening to be at the Doctor's, borrowed a little money of him, and went away again, saying he had business at a distance.

"And why couldn't you have told this afore, sir?" grumbled Aaron, when he had heard Dr. Jago's narrative.

"Because Hubert asked me not to mention it until he was back again," replied the little doctor. "But I thought it might be better to do so now, as he stays away so long and you seem to be getting into a fever over it."

"Do you know where he went to, sir?"

"No, I do not. He is all right, depend upon it, Aaron; he'll be turning up one of these fine days."

"All the same, he might have writ to me just a line," contended the old man.

Miss Winter was nearly as anxious as Aaron for the return of Hubert. She had determined to question him further upon that strange assertion he had made—that she had no right to Heron Dyke—and to insist upon a full and explicit answer. A thought crossed her mind sometimes that possibly Hubert might be fearing this very questioning, and was staying away in consequence.

And the time again rolled on. Three weeks came and went, and Hubert Stone remained to them all as one dead.

"He does not return, Miss Ella," cried Aaron to his mistress one morning; and there was a worn, pitiful look on his face that she had never seen before. "Dorothy's fretting frightfully: she will have it, something dreadful has happened to him, and that we shall never set eyes on him again."

Involuntarily there came into Ella's memory what Dorothy had told her about the dread apparition seen by her that midnight in the shrubbery. She herself had no faith in such superstitious fancies, but she could quite understand the hold they would have over the mind of a woman like Dorothy Stone.

"It is strange," she replied, "I grant that; and, as you say, he might have written. Still, had any harm befallen him you would

surely have heard of it from one source or another. I have felt no fear since I heard the report of Dr. Jago."

"But he stays so long, ma'am."

"We can only go on hoping for the best. Young men have sometimes strong fancies for roving, and they do not always think of those to whom their absence or silence may cause grief."

"He's gone to London, mayhap, that wild place, and won't come back till he's parted with his last shilling," suggested Aaron, anxious to snatch a morsel of comfort anyhow. "I'd once a fling of that sort myself, ma'am, when I was a young fellow, only I got no further than Norwich. They thought I had drowned myself; and father, he had Wippenham Pond dragged for me."

"Let us hope that Hubert's freak may prove no worse than yours," said Ella cheeringly. "Wait a moment; don't go; I want to speak to you."

Failing Hubert, Miss Winter had made up her mind to question Aaron whether he knew anything or not, for her suspense was becoming intolerable.

"Aaron," she began very gravely, "when your grandson Hubert was on board the wreck with me that afternoon, now three weeks ago, he told me something which made a very great impression upon me at the time, and which I cannot forget since. It is in my mind every hour of the day—a source of annoyance. As he does not return, I must question you."

Aaron gazed at his mistress. She thought he looked uneasy.

"What he said was this: 'A dozen words from me, and Heron Dyke would know you as its mistress no more. What you hold, you hold by fraud.' Now, Aaron Stone, I ask you, as my uncle's old and faithful servant, to tell me what meaning was hidden in your grandson's words, when he spoke to me thus."

Aaron's face was turning livid; he stood a picture of abject terror. Twice he essayed to speak, and twice no sound came from his dry lips. Miss Winter noted the emotion.

"What he knows—if there is anything to know—I think you must know; and I ask you, Aaron, what he meant."

"I know no more than the dead what he meant," gasped the old man in a husky whisper. "He must have been mad—mad!"

"Can you attach no meaning to his words?"

"None, ma'am; none whatever. He must have been quite mad."

"No, he was not mad I think. He spoke those words as a truthful man speaks. It seemed to me then, it seems to me still, that there was truth in them: though I don't know how much."

"Miss Ella," cried the old man eagerly, "you know what has been said—that a keg o' spirits was on board below. Hubert must have got to it."

That this was to a certain extent true, she believed; but not that he had taken sufficient to induce him to invent such a thing.

"His mother died in an asylum, poor thing," resumed Aaron, catching up his labouring breath; "and at times—only at times, you know, ma'am—I have not been able to rightly make him out, and I've fancied that he might have a touch of her complaint and wasn't altogether his own master. It must have been so that afternoon."

Aaron's hands trembled like those of a man afflicted with palsy, and the muscles of his face twitched convulsively as he spoke. His mistress could scarcely find in her heart to question him further.

"And yet it was a very strange assertion for Hubert to make," she said, speaking gently. "He stated distinctly that I held Heron Dyke by fraud. Now, were such the case, Aaron, you, as my uncle's almost confidential servant, must surely be aware of it. Hubert would not know what you do not, especially of a grave secret."

"That he'd not," affirmed the old man. "I knew more of the Squire's secrets, Miss Ella, than any man living. Were he alive this moment he'd tell you so."

"Then there was—there is—no fraud, as far as you are aware?"

"Certainly not, ma'am. How would it be possible?"

"That I cannot guess."

"Look here now, Miss Ella, there *couldn't be*. The Squire's will was drawn up by Lawyer Daventry, and signed by himself in the presence of witnesses. Everything but a few legacies was to come to you, as he had meant it to all his life. Fraud, ma'am! if he had left it away from you one might talk of fraud; not as it is. No, no! That wretched lad—and won't I give it him!—was in one of his wild fits when he said such words, not rightly accountable."

Could Miss Winter say more? She asked Aaron no further questions, but let him go. Still, in her own mind she could not feel satisfied. What brought that look of terror into Aaron's face when she repeated to him Hubert's words? Why had he trembled to that strange excess? and why had his emotion been so great?

And the more Miss Winter strove to assure herself that there was no cause to fear things were not honest and straightforward, the less she thought them so, and she resolved to speak to her uncle's lawyer, Mr. Daventry. Walking into Nullington, she found him at his office, and saw him alone.

"I have come to seek your advice on what seems to me a very important matter," she began, when she was seated. "I could not rest without coming to you."

"I need hardly say, my dear Miss Winter, that I am entirely at your service," he replied.

"It has been intimated to me that fraud of some kind has been at work in connection with my inheritance of Heron Dyke," she continued, having previously determined to avoid if possible the mention of Hubert's name. "I am precluded from telling you in what way this information reached me; but it was declared to me, in unmis-

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takable terms, that I had no more right to the property than have."

Lawyer Daventry's eyebrows went up in utter surprise. He drew his chair a little closer to that of Miss Winter, and began to bite his quill pen meditatively, as he waited to hear more.

"You, Mr. Daventry, had the management of all my uncle's most important affairs. You drew up his will; you were, I believe, present when he signed it; and you, I am sure, would not lend yourself to deceit of any kind: tell me then what, in your opinion, this information can mean."

"My opinion, Miss Winter, is that there is not an iota of truth in it. The chances are that it will turn out to be nothing more than an attempt to extort money."

"It will certainly not prove to be that," replied Ella, decisively. "On that point I can speak with confidence."

"You will not tell me who it was who gave you this information?"

"I would rather not; at least, at present. It was—I think I may say," she added somewhat hesitatingly—"an old friend."

"A very queer friend, it seems to me. He must have had a motive: what was it?"

"Pardon me," she rejoined, "but that is not the question. Let us assume, if you like, that the motive is not altogether unknown to me. What then? We are still no nearer what I want to know: whether it is possible that there can be any truth in the allegation."

"But the motive might be a malicious one. In which case——"

"Pardon me again, but the point is this," she interposed. "Is there anything within your knowledge of my uncle's affairs which would lead you to believe that the slightest possibility of fraud, in connection with my inheritance of his property, can exist?"

"No. It does not appear to me that the slightest possibility can exist of anything of the kind," continued Mr. Daventry. "I drew up your uncle's will in accordance with his instructions and his well-known wishes, and the will was duly signed and witnessed. Had he died before his seventieth birthday, the will would have been worthless, so far as the estate went; it would have lapsed to the other Gilbert Denison. Your uncle's savings you would still inherit, but not Heron Dyke. On the other hand, if he lived over his birthday, the property would be yours beyond possibility of dispute."

"And, as you can testify, he did live over it," returned Ella, feeling relieved.

Mr. Daventry smiled. "My dear young lady, I could not testify to anything of the kind. We lawyers are cautious men. As I did not see your uncle subsequent to his birthday, I could not testify to it."

"But others saw him! Others know that he lived over it!" cried Ella with a kind of gasp.

"Undoubtedly. I spoke only of my own personal knowledge."

"When did you see him last?—how long before his death? Perhaps you don't remember?"

"I remember perfectly well. It was on the 24th of November, the day he signed his will. I went to the Hall by appointment, with one of my clerks, and I was struck by the change I saw in the Squire. To me he looked like a dying man."

"But surely you saw him after that?" cried Ella, in surprise.

"No, I did not. I went up to call once or twice, but did not get to see him. That doctor, Jago, would admit nobody; and the last time the Squire sent out a curt message to the effect that when he wanted me he would send for me. On the 28th of April, early in the morning, a peremptory message came for me ——"

"Then you did see him subsequent to his birthday," interrupted Ella.

"A moment yet, please. I did not see him: I had gone to London the day before, and was not back. This answer was despatched to the Squire. He would not wait; Webb must go if I could not, came back the mandate; and by ten o'clock in the morning, Webb was at the Hall. He is my managing clerk, as you are aware, himself a qualified solicitor. He knew nothing much of the Squire's business, not having then long joined me."

"Did he see my uncle?"

"Oh, of course. The Squire was in bed; frightfully feeble, as it seemed to Webb. He wanted his will read over to him, and a short codicil added—which was done, and signed."

"Did Mr. Webb think him much changed?"

"Webb had never seen him before. He thought he looked curiously ill and feeble, so far as he could see of him in the darkened room. The Squire lay on the pillow, his black velvet skull-cap on, and his long white hair straggling on each side his shrunken face. Webb, describing this to me when I reached home at night, said he looked like a fine old picture. His voice had sunk to little more than a whisper; but his mind was clear, nay, vigorous."

The tears rose to Ella's eyes. She could see, in imagination, her poor uncle lying there.

"No, my dear young lady, rely upon it, there's no flaw in your succession to Heron Dyke," concluded the experienced lawyer. "My advice to you is, think no more of the affair. There's nothing in it, save, as Shakespeare says, 'A pure invention of the enemy.' Set your mind at rest."

Ella, somewhat reassured, though not wholly, went on her way. She could not forget the intense truth that had shone forth in Hubert Stone's countenance and tones. That *he* believed what he asserted had been to her mind entirely apparent.

It was a few days subsequent to this visit to Mr. Daventry, that Miss Winter was engaged to take afternoon tea at the Lilacs. Some

ladies were forming themselves into a committee for the purpose of ameliorating the condition of the poor of Nullington during the ensuing winter, and they were to meet that afternoon, Thursday, at Mrs. Ducie's. However, Miss Winter could not go, some friends having come to the Hall, unexpectedly, from a distance, and she sent Mrs. Toynbee to represent her.

So the new carriage from London, that had been so great an eyesore to old Aaron, conveyed her thither in state. Mrs. Toynbee enjoyed her afternoon immensely: she met Lady Cleeve, Maria Kettle, and other ladies with whom she had a slight acquaintance, who were already there. As Miss Winter's representative she found herself and her opinions deferred to, which was what she liked. Moreover, Mrs. Toynbee had some extraordinary news to tell, and was bursting with its importance.

Not until quite the last did she get a suitable opportunity; so much close discussion of the business in hand had taken place. Philip Cleeve had come in then; his mother had asked him to call for her. He was the only gentleman present, Captain Lennox having gone to Norwich. A remark made by some one gave the opportunity to Mrs. Toynbee.

"We had a most startling adventure at the Hall this morning," began she: and at the word, startling, the whole company fell into silence, and looked up. "Several rooms at the Hall, as I am given to understand, have been shut up for a great number of years; it was the late Mr. Denison's pleasure to keep them so —"

"Is Katherine Keen found?" interrupted one of the listeners, in excitement.

"Katherine Keen! oh, dear no," returned Mrs. Toynbee, stiffly. "In one of these unused rooms there stood a curiously-carved escritoire, or bureau, of polished black oak, a family heirloom, the panels of which bear the date of 1714. Miss Winter took a fancy to examine this relic, for so I may term it; she had it removed to her morning-room, and to-day, after breakfast, she set to work to examine its contents, calling me to her aid. They proved to be nothing more valuable than a number of expired leases, and other papers connected with the farm property. But while thus engaged we made a very curious discovery. By some means or other, probably from the accidental touching of a hidden spring, a secret recess at the back of the escritoire was suddenly exposed to view."

"Oh, dear, how delightful! A secret recess!"

"We were, as you may imagine, on the tiptoe of curiosity in a moment. I was, and I could see that Miss Winter was: she had seemed to me to be searching for some particular document, by the way she examined all the old papers."

"And what did you find in the recess?"

"What we found, hidden away from the light for it is hard to

guess how many years, was a huge mass of jewels," replied Mrs. Toynbee in slow and important tones.

"Jewels! good gracious!"

"Beautiful jewels. Rings, brooches, necklets, earrings, bracelets, and locket; nearly all set with precious stones of inestimable value. Of course their setting is sadly old-fashioned; that will have to be attended to."

The ladies went into fresh excitement. One and all exclaiming they should like to see the jewels.

"What have you done with them, Mrs. Toynbee?"

"Miss Winter has put them back into the cabinet. At the lowest estimation, the stones alone must be worth a thousand pounds."

"Articles of that value ought to be at the bankers'," remarked Philip Cleeve. He was standing by the mantelpiece, a little apart from the circle. An anxiety bordering on restlessness sat in his countenance, sufficiently apparent to one of those around him—Maria Kettle; and his hand, which had met hers on his entrance, felt dry and feverish.

"I daresay Miss Winter will send them to the bankers' in a few days' time," said Mrs. Toynbee in answer to the remark. "But she wants Mr. Daventry to see them first, and he is not at home. She —"

"Daventry is in London," interrupted Philip. "He won't be back till the beginning of next week—Monday or Tuesday."

"True," assented Mrs. Toynbee. "I called at the office as I drove in, and found that only Mr. Webb was there. Miss Winter—really she is an ultra-scrupulous young woman—does not feel sure whether the jewels rightly belong to her; she will do nothing with them before she gets Mr. Daventry's opinion. Until then they will remain where they are, untouched."

"I hope they will be safe," laughed Philip.

"Safe!" echoed Mrs. Toynbee: "why should they not be safe? They are where they have been lying hidden all these years. None of the servants have been told of the discovery; not even old Aaron and his wife."

"By the way," cried Margaret Ducie, lifting her head from the pencilled notes she had been making of the suggested plans for the relief of the poor, "has that relative of theirs, young Stone, turned up yet?"

"Not yet," said Mrs. Toynbee. "Nobody can imagine where he is staying. We think he must be unavoidably detained somewhere—though it is strange he does not write to say so."

The meeting and conversation recorded above took place on Thursday afternoon. On the following Monday morning old Aaron Stone proceeded, as usual, to open the doors and windows of the Hall—for he would not allow that duty to be performed by anybody

but himself. At an unearthly hour, as the maids considered it, whom he obliged to be also up in readiness for their work, old Aaron would be on the move. As he was on this day; there was only just light enough yet for him to see his way about.

After unbolting the outer doors, he first turned into Miss Winter's morning room, as it was called, which opened from the large hall. The moment he entered it, he saw that some one had been there before him. The lower sash of the window was thrown up, one of the shutters had been forced open, while sundry papers scattered about the floor betrayed that the *escritoire* had been visited. Aaron knew nothing about the jewels that had been found and left there; but the evidence of robbery was enough for him. Hurrying up to Miss Winter's chamber, he aroused her from sleep with his news. She partly dressed herself and followed him down.

Her first thought was of the jewels, and she proceeded to examine the secret recess. Yes, it stood open. The jewels had disappeared; they were stolen. But not another article in the room, save the bureau, had been touched.

Whilst his mistress was slowly gathering in these particulars, Aaron opened the other shutter, and stepped over the low sill into the garden. The hard gravelled path came close up to the window, so that he had little hope of finding any footmarks which might serve as a clue to the thief, or thieves. But Aaron, glancing keenly about, saw something lying under a holly bush, a little distance away, that for the moment caused his heart to stand still. To his old eyes it almost looked like Hubert; Hubert lying on his back.

The sleepy maids were beginning to come downstairs then. One of them; it was Betsy Tucker; entered the morning room, and stood half-dazed at what she saw. The window open, papers scattered on the carpet, her mistress, partially dressed, standing before the bureau, and Aaron hastening down the gravel path outside.

A low cry, growing into an agonised shriek, burst upon the girl's ear and that of her mistress. It came from the old man. He had dropped on one knee and was trying to lift what was lying there: Hubert Stone. Ah, never more, never more would he be lifted in life. His wide-open eyes, staring upwards, saw nothing, his form was rigid, his hair wet with the night's dews. He had been dead some hours, stabbed by some villain through the heart.

(To be continued.)

A SWAN'S SONG.

'MID lilled reaches of the Thames we guided
 Our boat—content, serene.
 If heart with heart e'er mingle, undivided,
 That day nought came between
 To break the spell that bound us, as we glided
 Thro' dappled gold and green.

You sang! There was no other sound in Nature,
 Thro' all the woods of June—
 The great heat stilled each voiceful woodland creature
 That golden afternoon:
 Till your voice broke the calm; with Love for teacher,
 You sang a quaint, old tune.

You ceased. Ah, was it Echo long a-dying,
 That sad, sweet, wailing note?
 Each over each, the lilies idly lying,
 Rocked with our drifting boat—
 While, with hush'd breath, we heard the death-song sighing
 From a wild swan's white throat.

We saw no form, but from the greenwood's centre
 Uprose the wild, clear cry:
 Perchance such strength in death's dark hour was lent her
 To reach and pierce the sky;
 Perchance the Paradise she longed to enter
 Rolled open to her eye.

* * * * *

Hush'd breath, clasped hands, full hearts, thro' summer even
 Our light boat sought the shore,
 As Charles's Wain, with all its star-points seven,
 Drove through the golden floor.
 Ah, love, we two have had our glimpse of Heaven—
 A joy for evermore!

G. B. STUART.

GENTLEMAN STEPHENS.

I.

A SUMMER'S afternoon was freshening into evening when a man rounded the top of a mountain in the West of England, and began its descent. Over his shoulder he carried a knapsack, and his clothes were such as a mechanic might have worn.

He was of middle height and rather slightly built, and his features were fine and striking if not particularly handsome.

The path which he followed overhung a ravine in the hill-side, and revealed, from a height of some eight hundred feet, a portion of the valley at the mountain's foot. Where the view first opened a species of platform invited to a moment's rest, and the traveller, yielding to the temptation, flung himself against the bank and took a survey of his surroundings.

On his left lay the ravine ; on his right, some yards below him, a miserable kind of shanty, scarcely worthy the name of cottage, was built out of the rock, with a little clearing and some fir trees round it, the latter giving it something of an Alpine character. It had probably been some shepherd's temporary abode, abandoned from its inclement situation, for the padlock that roughly secured the door was rusty, and little glass remained in the crazy windows. The hills opposite stood across a rather narrow valley, and suddenly lowering their crests in the north-west, left an opening like a gully through which the wind might work its will. Below smiled the valley in pastoral repose, a small scattered village in its midst, and a peaceful looking little church standing between the homesteads of the living and the graves of the dead. A fair June sunshine lay on everything, and the hay-fields were ripe to harvest.

The traveller gazed upon that scene as if he could never tire of its beauty. One might have pictured him a wanderer come back again to his childhood's home, but although he had only landed from America the week before this, after an absence of some fifteen years from his native land, he had never seen this spot before.

It were impossible to say what worked the spell. Stephens, for so our traveller called himself, was only dimly conscious at this moment of the fascination on him, but he knew afterwards that a determination came on him at first sight of that valley and those mountains to stay his steps among them, and ask of them a home after all his aimless wanderings.

Stephens gazed on, tired after a long day's walk. One minute, only the pathetic bleating of the sheep and lambs answering each other in contrasting cadence, and the ever monotonous, ever changing mur-

mur of the "burn;" the next came footsteps down the path, and he looked up and saw above him perhaps the most beautiful face it had ever been his good fortune to behold.

Its possessor was a country girl in peasant dress, with petticoat short enough to show a well-turned pair of feet descending, with the ease of familiarity, the mountain path. Her dress and figure were neat, she knitted as she came along, and her face might have been the ideal of a poet. Beauty that borders on perfection must always be rare, and it is strange in what capricious nooks Nature sometimes disposes of her favourites. The beauty of this girl was not even rural. The exquisitely moulded features, delicate complexion, oval face and tiny ear, might have graced any court, and the deep-grey eyes looking out from under black curled lashes and bent brows would have rivalled any diamonds their owner could have worn.

"Good evening to you," she said, with the well-bred ease of a mountaineer, as she passed, scanning a little curiously so unexpected a thing as a stranger in that lonely spot. Stephens returned her greeting, and she passed on without a pause; but it was not in human nature not to try for a second look at that fair face.

"Can you tell me whether this path will take me to the village, and whether there is an inn there where I can get a night's lodging?"

The lovely face turned back and looked up at him, all the lovelier that a rather deeper colour than before was on her cheek. She gave him his directions, however, without the least embarrassment, while he drank in her beauty in observant silence, detaining her when she had done by another question that he might well have answered for himself.

"Does anyone live here?" he asked.

"There? oh, no; no one has lived there for a long time, it is so rough up here. Good evening to you, again." And with a pleasant nod the mountain Venus went on her way.

Meanwhile Stephens threw himself at full length on the grass, with his hands clasped behind his head, and thought of his half-vagrant life in America, and his vague plans for the future, both prospects darkened over by the shadow that brooded for ever, and must brood, at his heart. It was a sad story, and his one of those strange careers, seemingly borrowed by fact from fiction, that now and again vary the uniformity of a conventional world. His hands might well be finely shaped; his head might well be nobly set; his features, despite the ravages of a wild life, might well bear still an aristocratic stamp that could never be eradicated, for this man in working dress, inured to a life of vagabondage and toil, was an earl's son, and the descendant of a long line of noble ancestors.

But in spite of what some might have considered this happy accident of birth, he had not been fortunate in his parentage. His father was a reckless man, bent only on pleasure, devoid of principle, and cold-hearted and harsh towards his family, while his

mother had failed yet more in winning the affections of her children. To extreme worldliness of practice she joined religious opinions of the most narrow and forbidding type, so that the sons, whose delinquencies she was always lamenting, grew up hating the very names of penitence and reformation, and, in short, all the spiritual teaching to which they had been subjected. The children were six in number, and it is to be hoped that each of them found out for him or herself in after life that the teaching alone was at fault, and that the thing taught was beautiful, pure, and of good report. This man stretched now on the grass had something in his face to make one think that, despite his apparent degradation, he had not been wholly behind in this recognition.

Stephen St. Hilary Farquhar Pierrepont was the youngest son of Lord Hazlemount, and when on his leaving school his father had procured a commission for him in a certain crack regiment, he washed his hands of him and left him to himself. Inheriting something of his father's wild and extravagant tastes, and delighted with his freedom, Stephen at once proceeded to sow his wild oats with an unsparing hand, and by the time a couple of years had passed over his head, he found his affairs in a constantly increasing state of embarrassment. He feared and shrank from the anger of both his parents; from his father's violent temper, and his mother's reproaches, that he knew so well would be mingled with self-glorification at having prophesied no good of him from his earliest years. To stave off the evil hour of confession of his reckless extravagance, he had borrowed a certain sum of money from a friend, but soon after, the friend being himself unexpectedly hard pressed, recalled the loan, and Stephen, knowing the money spent, and dismayed at the idea of failing his benefactor, knew not what step next to take.

Among some of Stephen's friends a gambling mania had of late prevailed, and into that unfortunate fascination he had been drawn, when one day came that was never to be forgotten through all his after career.

He was at cards with some of his brother officers and several others. The play ran high, Stephen's losses were considerable, his desire to win at least enough to pay his friend was passionate and pressing, and still the luck was against him. Then the temptation and the weak moment came together, as they are ever apt to do, and Stephen fell. He saw an opportunity to gain by cheating, took it, won, was watched throughout, and exposed on the instant. It was all the work of a few minutes, but the old life was over from that hour.

The camel-swallowing laws of honour are strange things, right in the abstract, but often mercilessly severe in individual cases. This ever-to-be-deplored offence of Stephen's was no representative act. He had never in his life cheated at any game whatsoever before, and never, oh, never, bear him witness, was that sad error of his life

repeated, but not one among those assembled gave the unhappy boy (he was little more) the benefit of the doubt. Horrified at his own action, he had no word to say in self-defence, and in his poor young face, white and wild with remorse, terror and shame at what he had done, they read only guilt. Stephen had to leave his regiment, and truly it was the black cap of execution they put on, and a sentence of death to a mortal life they then pronounced.

The nightmare darkness of the days that followed always seemed to him, in looking back, the very abomination of desolation. He wrote to his mother, pleading for forgiveness, but the letter he received from her in return did not encourage him to go to her for comfort. His brothers and sisters stood one and all aloof. The black sheep of the family, in spite of his unfortunate slip, had a warmer heart than any of them. Perhaps of all the conduct of his relations he found the rough-handed punishment of his father was easiest to bear. True, he cut him off with a shilling and declined to see him, but he paid his debts, giving him also his passage-money for America and a certain sum wherewith to start him there: bidding him from henceforth either drop the family name or cease to disgrace it. Ashamed and sorrow-stricken, and well-nigh broken-hearted, the poor youth took the former alternative as the safer course, and he had been known as Stephens through all his American career.

Into the details of that career there is no need to enter. It was not strange that, brought up as he had been, he should have no great predilection for any work in particular, and he had adopted no fixed line of action.

He had wandered much from place to place, tried his hand, not without credit sometimes, at a score of crafts, done many wrong things and more foolish, but from one thing he abstained with rigid determination—he never again gambled for a great sum or a small. Not from any fear of his own weakness: for some witness in himself (God's often acquittal under man's verdict) told him that nothing could ever again make him sin in that particular: but lest his very heart should die at memory of that past hour of degradation.

Who suffers passionately and to repentance, has the seeds of a noble life in him; and although there was not much to show for it in the erratic and vagabond life he had sunk to, the harvest of it sprang up in the nooks and corners of his character and doings, to be noted by Him in whose eyes no man is an outcast.

At last a longing to return to the old country came upon him with force he could not resist, and he obeyed its voice. But although it was the "heimweh" of the Germans, the "hiraeth" of the Welsh that moved him, it was of country, not of home. To Castle Pierrepoint he never would return. Both his parents had died in the prime of life during his absence. His eldest brother, now Lord Hazlemount, was married and his reign well begun; the other brothers and sisters were all scattered and married, and he had no reason to believe that

any one amongst them would extend him recognition, much less welcome, should he now appear before them. He had brought back with him from America the fruits of a lucky enterprise to the amount of a few hundred pounds, but whether to invest them profitably, or whether to live on them in comfort until spent and then "buckle to" again—go back to America and work for more—was all undecided yet. A kind of interlude had come into his life, as it will sometimes to most of us, in which it seemed impossible even to think actively an any subject. All he had settled was that until some plan resolved itself in his mind he should pass as a labourer in search of work, and take any employment that offered.

At last the sunshine faded quite away, and rising and descending to the cottage he took a long survey of the interior through the broken windows, half-smiling as he did so at an idea that entered his mind—an idea not to be dismissed, it appeared, without some consideration. The survey over, he set himself to the task of the steep descent of the mountain, and, that accomplished, proceeded to the village to find a lodging for the night.

II.

THE hay harvest had just begun in the valley, and labourers being rather scarce, Stephen found, without difficulty, employment now at one farm, now at another. He was well up to his work and liked it, the people were not more rough than might be expected, and very good-natured, and the weather was perfect.

In the rows of haymakers were many pretty girls, getting more or less sunburnt under their quilted bonnets or straw hats, and among them Stephen was not slow to recognise the lovely face he had first seen beside the mountain cottage. The talk and merriment of the haymakers flowed on as fast as their rakes moved. Sometimes Stephen worked among their merry-hearted, ever advancing and receding file, sometimes took his turn among the more silent mowers, putting in a word now and then, but for the most part letting fancy set his thoughts as she pleased to the rhythms of the scythes. From the unmown meadows near, the landrail's untranslatable *rasp-rasp* came in persistent and most sweet discord, bringing thoughts of cool retreats among the long grasses and waving blooms so soon to be sacrificed to the prostrating scythe.

Stephen rapidly made acquaintance among the haymakers, and, under cover of universal attentions among the women, contrived to come pretty often into the vicinity of the belle of the field. At first he seldom addressed himself to her directly, but watched the effects on her of his words to others, and waited until she gave him a look from her violet eyes, and a dimpled smile or laugh in payment for his jests. Then he would go away, for a while contented. But it is dangerous to play with stimulants, and he knew it from the beginning.

He soon found out her name was Mary Tannett, and in that scene of familiar work and play it was not difficult to discover something of the character of those around. That hers was eminently lovable was soon apparent. She was industrious and good-tempered, merry alike with the girls and little children, and, it must be confessed, not less so among the men, although never transgressing the bounds of modesty. Nature had been prodigal in her gifts to Mary, both of person and disposition; if it had also made her aware of her power over men, and something of a flirt, was it greatly to be wondered at, or severely to be blamed? She had heaps of lovers, and, as far as Stephen could see, gave a certain amount of laughing and innocent hay-field encouragement to all alike, and had no objection to adding a new-comer to their list. Before a week was out, he was flirting with her vigorously—whether in jest or earnest he did not ask his fate to tell him.

Although Torsfoot was a quiet little hamlet, there was coming and going in it as it goes in the world, and strange workmen were no unusual feature there, as employment to such was often given in mines and quarries near.

The marks of good-breeding about Stephen did not wholly escape the shrewdness of the villagers, and he came to be known among them as Gentleman Stephens, and to have sundry little favours shown him as time went on. One of these was of a peculiar kind. That nook among the mountains, where first we beheld him, had not lost its fascination for Stephen, and when he saw that he could get work enough to suit him over the summer months, he asked, and obtained permission to carry out the idea with which it had inspired him, and inhabit the deserted cottage: giving it as a reason for doing so that the fresh air and freedom of the mountains were more suited to him, used as he was to a settler's life, than the confinement of the valley. There was truth in this, and little risk in granting the request. Since, had Stephen been the most accomplished thief in the world, there was nothing to abscond with in his new abode, except the bare materials of the cottage; an old bedstead, and a couple of benches, that were fixtures in it. Nor did he trouble himself with any furnishing beyond the merest necessities. He took nearly all his meals in the village, coming down from his eyrie in the early morning to his work, and toiling back again under the stars or through the moonlight of that fine summer, with a spirit that had more and more to unburden in the solitude of his self-chosen exile.

It is well to live at times midway between the village and the stars, taking counsel from each in turn, and thus it was revealed to Stephen, clear as daylight, what in reality he had come to seek. He had long been outgrowing an aimless, wandering life, and if his development had been slow, it had been complete. He asked at last to be led to a better and nobler existence, and had the rare wisdom to divine it might be found best for him now in a safe and settled home, however lowly, in harmless industry and a manly

adherence to a standard of right that insensibly had grown higher from year to year. It was well. But beside that discovery, what was this sweet unrest and darling hope that had also sprung to life? Out of that purposeless pause in his life a purpose was growing, and the garland of hay-field flowers wherewith he had laughingly bound himself turned by a magic touch into fetters not to be broken without cost and pain.

Just as on the day of his arrival there he had recognised in the placid burn and breeze possible agents of destruction, so now in this summer love of his he saw possibilities of satiety on the one hand, and disappointment on the other. Prudence was not a *Pierrepoint* characteristic, but Stephen knew now that he faced a risk. He had preferred a wandering life hitherto to any other: might he not, if he married Mary, and settled in this village, find the monotony become unbearable when joined with uneducated surroundings, and unrelieved by the change and adventure of a colonist's life? Doggedly something in him replied that if he did the deed he would take and bear the consequences somehow. From his own estate he had fallen for ever, and marriage was alone likely to have attractions for him in the case of a sweet, pure girl like Mary whom he really loved. Surely something of an elevation, something of refinement and happiness might be found in a union with her, and love would bridge the inequalities between them? Yes, and again yes. And yet, should he after all his years of hard experience risk his happiness on a woman's word, believe a woman's smile, and trust her faith?

Danger was easily realised, prudence easily invoked on the mountains, but some Thessalian magic had surely been wafted to that valley strong to undo his resolutions. In spite of his meditations overnight it needed but to find that Mary, owing to her mother's illness, was one day absent from the hay-field, to make the desire to seek her almost uncontrollable. It was only a small obstacle in his way, but Stephen, like all warm lovers, felt an obstacle was there only to be overcome.

By this time Stephen had been over a month in the place, and the harvest was now being finished. He had learnt the ways of the people pretty well, and knew enough of Mary's habits to be able to follow her in the evening to the field where she milked her cow. She looked more lovely than ever as she received him, glad to see one of her late companions come to enliven a dull day. The beauty and the gladness combined were too much for him. Stephen threw wise resolutions to the winds, and his heart sprang to his lips before he had well settled what to say.

Mary protested, refused to listen, and rebuked his overboldness (stranger that he was) in making such a request. Overboldness in a lover, pleaded Stephen, was a good fault, so was there any other thing against him? Was she engaged? It might or might not be

so. Mary grew shy, evaded direct answers, bewitched the cow into troublesome antics, cumbered Stephen with all the milking utensils to carry, and finally escaped from him into the cottage, where he forebore to follow, respecting the presence of the invalid.

Baffled and puzzled as to the real reason of the refusal, but by no means disheartened, Stephen passed back into the lane and met there one of the haymakers going home, a rake over his shoulders.

"What are you always after that girl for?" said the labourer. "There are plenty of others to be had for the asking, and they say she is engaged to William Morpeth."

"And who is William Morpeth?" said Stephen, turning with his counsellor to lean over a gate, and catching a wisp of hay that hung on the hedge, to twist idly round his fingers.

"He works now at Bailey's farm on the hill yonder," said the man, "but he belongs here, and very poor folks they are. His father is bedridden and lives in the cottage by the Tannetts' over there. Some says she has given him her word to marry him, but the Morpeths' is a poor house to go to, and they could never get married yet."

No later than next day Stephen Pierrepont and William Morpeth met face to face. Each took special note of the other, as was not unnatural, since Stephen recognised in William the first formidable rival in Mary's affections he had yet encountered, while many officious voices had apprised William of the stranger's attentions to his sweetheart.

William was not a rival to be despised. Ten years on the right side of Stephen, he was a handsome young fellow, dark eyed and dark haired, with a red and brown complexion that recalled latitudes more southern than that of Britain. He was warm-natured, too, and full of merriment and insouciance, and Stephen could not help confessing to himself that William had one of those characters that have a particularly marked personality, so that he caused a sensible difference in the work and play of the harvest, whereas many had come and gone there, making no especial mark. William's superabundant life and spirits made his entrance to a group to be followed pretty certainly by laughter and "daffing," and the frequent call for him among the men made it plain that he could put his hand to the various tasks going on with good effect. They said he had been a treasure to his master at Bailey's farm, and knew more of crops and stock than the farmer himself, but he would soon be out of place, as this master gave up his tenancy at Michaelmas and his servants would be dismissed. Waiting for the corn harvest to begin, William had come home for a short stay, and took the good the gods gave him in the harvest gaieties with alacrity. Both Stephen and he were particular favourites among the women, and the chief object of their attention might have been considered to divide her favours very evenly between them.

A desperate strength rose up in Stephen's soul, the excitement of competition acting on him with a tonic power. If only to be avenged on his former life he must win Mary. He would bring good out of evil, turn the ill consequences of the past into friendly agents, if only he might take this girl, good and pure as she was bright and beautiful, to his heart and hearth.

Oh, the thoughts that arose in Stephen's heart as he sat on summer nights outside his cottage, the purification that came out of the yearning, the noble aspirations that sprang from his love! Only those who have fallen can know the joy of an uprising, or what it is, in retracing painfully past errors, to find with glad surprise the road of repentance opening suddenly on green pastures and fair new beginnings. The Jacob's ladder of his dreams joined earth to heaven in a way that the assurance of his best self told him was no romantic or impossible fancy, and, if William was to be sacrificed, he could not accept the notion that Mary's love could be to that careless young fellow the thing of moment and salvation it had become to himself.

But days passed on and Stephen was not wholly satisfied with the result. When others were by, Mary would laugh and chaff with him, if he challenged her, as much as ever, but he could rarely secure her for a tête-à-tête. When he did she was shy and silent and eager to escape: whereas he had surprised her more than once strolling through the lanes with William in tranquil talk, or leaning against the ricks with him in some undisturbed nook, or lingering by the stiles, left behind by others going home.

So time passed on until all Stephen's passions were at fever heat, and the hour came at last when he felt he might seek his fate again at Mary's hands without this time being precipitate in doing so. William had gone back to his work, but not easy at leaving a rival behind him, he returned on every leisure evening he could get, to haunt Mary's neighbourhood and keep an eye on Stephen's movements.

It was a dewy August evening. Here and there in the valley, meadows thick with corn sheaves made picturesque variety amid the green of the harvested hayfields, while the later corn waved its seas of brown gold in triumphal ripeness. Blackberries in fruit and blossom trailed over the banks, nuts were ripening on the hedges, but Stephen looked on none of these things as, with concentrated resolution and hope in his face, he passed out of the village and through the fields that gradually rose towards the ascent of the mountain.

By a stile that looked out on a lane Stephen made a halt, and, leaning against it, looked somewhat musingly up the lane down which he expected Mary shortly to pass. She had been doing a day's needlework at one of the cottages, and he knew the hour of her returning. He was there to-night to win a wife, nay, to win what seemed to him the salvation of his wild career, or else—but he did not give a name to the alternative.

Down the lane came Mary, but Stephen stepped back into the field with a muttered exclamation, for at her side was William. Something warned Stephen that he could not trust himself just then to meet his rival without mischief coming from the encounter. He stood back against the hedge to let them pass, himself unseen, uncertain what course he should then proceed to take. But the Olympian gods had prepared for themselves a little tableau on this August evening among the dews, and were not to be baulked. Stephen heard the advancing steps and voices drawing nearer, and as he caught the substance of the words his face grew eager.

"Stop here," said William, as they neared the stile; "now or never we must have it out"—and they came to a stand leaning against the rails. Stephen stood irresolute, out of sight, but within hearing; then the conversation began again, and his resolution was taken. He had done many wrong things in his life, and he did one more now, for he stood still where he was, and William and Mary spoke on.

"You say you care for me," said William, "and I have always believed and trusted you, and been willing to wait; but one may play at that game too long, and a new face may take a girl's fancy more than an old one."

"Your face is none so old as Gentleman Stephens'," said Mary, with a laugh.

"I don't care," said William. "You talk plenty with him whatever his face may be, and how can I tell what the fellow says to you when you are alone. I can never get much sense from you about it."

"You have no need to care about that after what I told you just now," said Mary. "Some people would not take it so light, I can tell you."

"Mary," said William, putting his arm round her waist, a movement she half resisted and half allowed, "I do not take it light; but listen here, my dear, for I did not tell you all just now. I would not vex you by being jealous and doubting you, no, not about no one, if I could stay here and fight it out fair with that fellow. If I could only take Bailey's farm I should be afraid of nought. We would get married at once, and I know I could make it pay if only I had enough to make a start."

"They were saying up at Reeves' the other night that you had a wonderful notion of farming," said Mary.

"To be sure I have," said William, with naïve seriousness. "There would be no fear for me if only I had money to put into the land; but where is it to come from? I can only make a little here bit by bit, and maybe it will be five years to come before I get enough to do it."

"Well, we can wait," said Mary; "we are young enough to do that yet awhile."

"Not I," said William. "I am tired already of waiting, and my

mind is made up. I mean to go to California and try my luck there for a year or two, and I'm going right away this autumn. Nay, Mary, you are never going to cry," said he, although his own voice was husky enough.

"Oh, William, William," said Mary, "you will never, never go away and leave me all alone?"

A sob broke from her with the words, but when she would have sunk her face on her hands, William drew it instead to his shoulder. He spoke no more than she did for a minute or so, and when he did his voice had that preternatural clearness about it that reminds one of the fleeting sunshine of a showery day.

"Come, come, Mary, cheer up. It is nothing to cry for. I will be back before you well-nigh think I am gone. There are fine fortunes to be made out there, and what's to hinder me from making one? We shall not want a very large one, I take it, to begin life with, anyway, and it will be a first-rate thing for me to see a bit of the world before settling down. There are many ways out there, besides the gold-digging, of making money, and when a man has his mind set on it as I have he finds them out. Why, I have heard them say that at games—cards and such like—a man may put a small sum of money down and gain back in one evening more than we earn here in a twelvemonth."

"But don't some say it is wicked to play cards for money?" said Mary.

"Some do; but it is all nonsense. What is fair for one is fair for another; it is all on the square. I will not bring you back one penny that is not fairly my own, and if it will come by working I would rather get it that way; but if I cannot I shall try some other dodge."

"Oh, William, you have no call to think of any of them. You said yourself last Easter you would never be jealous of Will Massey again; and there is Dick Bradshaw going off to London, if it's him you mind."

"No, Mary, you know very well it is not Bradshaw or Massey that I mind about now. It is that confounded Gentleman Stephens that is driving me wild. He is not one of our sort, bad luck to him. Gentleman or not, he has a way with him that you women seem to like. You are not plain with me about him, Mary, as you are about the rest."

Mary was silent. William struck his foot impatiently against a stone.

"I daresay I am a fool for my pains," he resumed presently, "to go away and give him such a chance, but I must have that money, and there is no other way. I will get it in whatever way I can and come back. If I find you have played me false and forsaken me for him, it will be only one more fellow gone to the bad, I suppose, and on his head be the curse of it." He clenched the

gate with his hands fiercely as he spoke, love and jealousy, those old authors of a thousand tragedies, tearing at his heart.

"William," said Mary, in a subdued voice, "I will tell you the whole truth about Gentleman Stephens if you will listen now."

"Well," said William, and he put his head down on his arms to listen.

"He asked me to be his wife a month ago," said Mary, "and I said 'No,' but that's not it, for he has been just the same since then, and maybe means to ask again. I like him, William, there's no denying that; I shall always like him; but I could never marry him if he asked me a hundred times; never, never. Perhaps it is because he is so much older than you and me, or perhaps it is what you said just now about his not being of our sort, and that he is, as they have been saying, a gentleman in disguise, but I can never speak comfortably with him when we are alone; there seems the world between us somehow. It is easy enough to talk and laugh when others are by, he is so amusing, and you know I said I liked him."

"Yes," returned William, rather sullenly, "you need not tell me that again."

"Well, but that is all. It was nice to have him notice one so much more than the rest," said Mary frankly; "and no one can help seeing he is a very nice man, but I could never marry anyone I did not feel at home with. He is nothing in the world to me like what you are—only just my friend."

"And what am I to you?" asked William. Mary did not reply, but the look she gave her lover was enough, and he took her triumphantly in his arms.

A few days later the head of a well-known banking firm in the neighbouring county town gave audience to a stranger whose mission and whose manner set the banker pondering, as being somewhat at variance with his self-assigned character, which was that of a working man. The result of the conference was that a sum of money, amounting to several hundred pounds, was lodged in the banker's hands, to be paid over at once to William Morpeth, accompanied by a few written words, unsigned, and which ran as follows:

"Your conversation on Friday evening was overheard by one who had no right to listen, but whom it concerned in a way that need not be mentioned here, but which you will both know. He sends this sum of money, in apology, as a parting wedding gift to you and your bride, and hopes it may come useful to stock the farm. If you think it at all necessary to repay the giver, you can do so in this way: never play cards, or anything else for large sums of money, in case you should be tempted in a moment of weakness, as many another has been before you, to some deed of dishonour which you may vainly repent for the remainder of your days."

It was not difficult for William and Mary to conjecture from whom

that money came, and deep were their gratitude and compunction in doing so. With conjecture, however, they had to be satisfied. After receiving his wages on that Saturday morning, Gentleman Stephens had vanished from Torsfoot and the mountain hut as suddenly as he had come.

III.

It was November, and a storm of wind and rain from the north-west had been driving for days over Torsfoot. The fern on the mountain side was brown, and the rain hung like tear-drops on the sere plumes that had once been so beautiful. The grass was soaked and slippery with wet, and the torrent leaped down the ravine from point to point like an athlete whose sport was turned into desperate earnest.

Down over the mountain brow came, once more, Stephen Pierrepont, and stood, as he had stood that day in June, to look upon the valley. Its aspect was changed indeed since then. Swamped, swelled, and browned with rain, white mists hung in shrouds on the mountains, with breaks here and there through which the headlands loomed out in sterner outlines from their isolation. Yet was there beauty in that wild scene for eyes that could see it. Stephen too was changed. He was thin and pale, and the thought intruded itself on him, although impatiently repressed, that he had over-rated his strength for the journey he had taken that day. He was here this time not to stay, but only to take a farewell look at the place where he had known so much happiness and so much pain—a matter of sentiment only, but one too strong for him to resist.

He knew that William and Mary were married ere this, and comfortably settled on Bailey's farm, thanks to the money he had given them. But he had no wish to meet or speak with either of them again, now that anger against the one was over, and love for the other must be foresworn. Yet he was here—here like an unbidden spectre, back at the spot where he had seen her first, and which had fascinated him with a spell which had carried in it love, and suffering, and doom. Looking at the cottage, he thought of the last night he had passed there, and the conflict he had gone through during sleepless hours of agony never to be forgotten. Again his love yearned for requital, again his pride rebelled at thought of his rival's triumph, again generosity rising above self was moved to pity for the lovers, and again the collapse of the new life he had dreamed of brought him face to face with the loneliness and failure of his own career.

In that chaos of feeling one resolute determination had alone maintained itself—a resolution formed quickly while yet he leaned against the hedge, an undreamt of listener to the loves and troubles of William and Mary, for Stephen's was one of those natures whose generous impulses are sentinel to all others, the first to be challenged, however

soon after less laudable passions might awake. This determination had also been the one that had resolved itself into action, for, as we have seen, a few days later Stephen had bestowed all his worldly goods on the pair whose loves had cost himself so dear, saving them from parting and temptation, and cutting off from himself any possible advantage that William's absence might have brought.

With characteristic imprudence, Stephen had given well-nigh all he had to give, reserving only to himself enough to keep him from absolute want while seeking work elsewhere. And Fortune, who ever loves to take us at disadvantage, had dealt badly with him ever since that deed of Quixotic generosity. At last life itself had been threatened. He had fallen ill of an intermittent fever, and although he had struggled through it in the hospital of a certain town and recovered, it was with a much reduced fund of strength that he had started again on his wanderings.

Worst of all, his spirit was more broken than anyone looking at his face would have believed, for we players in the comedy of Life must often give the lie to our heart's experience thus. The present was weary, the future a blank, while the events of the summer seemed to have happened long ago to some other self who had died and bequeathed but a barren heritage to the self of to-day. So he settled to leave England and return to America, and work and wear away his days there as best he might in harmless if uninteresting monotony. He had wandered south, but began retracing his steps to Liverpool as soon as the doctor had given him his dismissal from the hospital. He chose the route that passed near Torsfoot, but nevertheless kept up a deception with himself, with some success, that he had no intention of visiting it on the way. Even this very day he had made no provision for doing so; yet when he came to the spot where the ascent of the mountain began he turned to it at once, leaving the main road to do so, and giving up the chance of reaching the next town that night. He had taken a meal that morning at a way-side inn, but the fare was coarse, and Stephen's invalided appetite had turned from it in disgust, so that the landlord told him he was a cheap customer to feed. Stephen ascended the mountain, naturally, on the opposite side from that he had come over on his arrival from Liverpool, and he found by degrees the difference was not to his advantage. The ascent was gradual and very deceptive, with many downs and ups to toil over, and the sun of the brief November day was just setting as he stood at last on the knoll above the mountain cottage.

He was weary from want of food as well as from the laborious miles he had trodden that day, and it would take him yet some time to reach the village if he made up his mind to go there for food. Indecision kept him irresolute, and as he waited one of those stormy but beautiful gleams that often break through a wet day at sunset, burst on valley and hills around. Great imperial clouds, armaments

of another sphere, piled themselves one on the other in gloomy and ever-changing grandeur; between them the spaces of sky were almost green, and the parting sun looked down in triumph to see how sad the world could become without him. It was a brief pageant. Scarcely had the gold passed from the hill tops than the clouds, too, like deposed autocrats, lost the splendour of their borrowed glories, and stood out threatening and black; the dusk gathered quickly, and the wind at intervals swept in gusts across the mountains. The rain began again, and Stephen came out of his reverie with a sudden start. Yes, he would go down to the valley and seek the food he so much needed. The next step showed him what the knoll he had stood on had concealed. The torrent of the ravine had sent out a tributary arm, that, breaking across the path, made descent, or approach to the cottage, a matter of some difficulty. Stephen's practised eye measured both the difficulty and the best means of coping with it with quick accuracy.

Avoiding the path, he descended the grassy slope, crossed the broken edges of the brawling stream, sure-footed as ever, and then—suddenly stretched his full length on the ground with an exclamation of pain.

For a few minutes there he lay, and then with difficulty regained his footing on the slippery ground, and leant on his stick, which luckily had not rolled beyond his reach. Even with its aid, progress was extremely difficult, for he had not only sprained his right ankle severely, but injured the knee as well. The question which had so recently perplexed him was simplified now. The descent of the mountain to-night was impracticable, and he might think himself lucky that the cottage was close at hand to yield him an asylum. Slowly and painfully he reached its door, pushed open the rough latch and entered.

It was just as he had left it, except for the removal of a few things which the neighbours had taken away. But the scanty furniture had that weird look about it which belongs alone to the furniture of long uninhabited rooms—as if it had been at no good before the opening of the doors, and only resumed innocence and immovability when brought under man's scrutiny once more. The fancy struck Stephen with a melancholy feeling of repulsion as he entered, but he had no leisure for fostering it, as at first his hands were full lighting a fire, and attending to his hurt as best he could. Darkness had fallen ere his tasks were completed. He secured the door, and arranged himself with what comfort he could on the settle by the fire, into the dismal flames of which, rising fitfully from the damp wood, he gazed as earnestly as if he read his fortune there. He was faint and weary with pain and fasting, for beyond some water he had procured from the spring, there was absolutely nothing for him to eat or drink. The night was very dreary, the rain beating incessantly upon the thatch, and the wind, which had fallen, returning once again to try

the strength of the door. The darkness outside found its way into the cottage, giving mystery to every corner, and lurking in secret places, as if it watched to seize on Stephen when the protection of the fire should be withdrawn.

Was it wonderful that he sat there in dejection? Under the most favourable circumstances, pain and prostration of strength can bring desolation of soul that words are poor to express, and Stephen was in the wilderness now with none to sustain or cheer him, his portion in this world summed up to him in three bitter words: want, suffering, and loneliness. Love had seemed near him but a few short months ago. Even now the smiling image of the most beautiful face he had ever seen looked at him from the fire. But there, as so often before, ill fate had followed him, and he who might once have aspired to the noble ladies of rank and fashion, had failed to win the heart of a rustic bride from her rustic lover. Foiled, foiled! Was a curse to rest on him for ever for the sin of his youth? Was there no love for him in heaven or earth that could make some amends for the dreary road he had trodden and must tread? No answer of peace and promise spoke out of his heart, and Stephen leant his head on the rough arm of the settle, a discouraged and well-nigh broken-hearted man. This intensity of sadness was followed by a stupor from which the pain of his ankle roused him, and, seeking the bedstead in the corner of the cottage, he flung himself down upon it. The fire had gone out—but it was no matter, for weakness, damp, pain and hunger had done their work, and Stephen was soon tossing in the heat and restlessness of fever. At intervals, consciousness of his present surroundings returned, but for the most part his mind was over-ridden by the disproportionate fancies of delirium, and it was morning ere he slept.

He woke in the afternoon faint and exhausted, got up and opened the door and reviewed his situation. It was not cheering. The pain and swelling were great in his leg, so that the walk across the cottage was with difficulty accomplished, and to attempt the descent of the mountain was impossible. He shouted with a somewhat enfeebled voice as he looked down through the mists at the distant village, but from the height at which he stood, the chances were poor indeed that he would be heard, and there was little likelihood that any would be on the mountains at this time of year, and in such weather. None came, and darkness fell again. The second night was an exaggerated repetition of the first.

On the third afternoon when Stephen dragged himself to the door he fainted with the pain. By degrees the air revived him, and he came to himself. The spring was close at hand, he reached it and drank a draught of water, then leaning against the bank he looked down wistfully once more upon the village. He did not shout to-day; he did not look expectantly around as if for help. He only looked at the village and the churchyard, at the hayfields of last summer, and

at Bailey's farm upon the opposite uplands, with its pretty house sheltering safely from the winter's rages among ricks, and orchards, and pleasant pastures. Stormy clouds were hurrying past the sun, but his lowering beams lingered lovingly on that happy spot. Stephen's face had grown terribly wan, and there was a strange look on it as he narrowly scanned the familiar view, in spite of the weariness that was on him. He had dreamed and thought much of Mary during that past night: much too of old tender memories of childhood, and of his parents, brothers and sisters: memories from which even his sad experience had not excluded him. He thought too of other things, but those thoughts went up straight to Heaven and left no record on earth. He was too weary to look out long, but turned his gaze from the sheltered homes of the valley to the desolate cottage. The intense chill of fever was on him, but there was no more wood left to light the fire, and only the hardest of couches waited for his pain-racked limbs. Nevertheless he went in calmly and shut the door.

"William," said Mary Morpeth that evening to her husband as they sat at their comfortable tea, "there was smoke again to-day in the mountain cottage. Perhaps Gentleman Stephens has come back. Let us go up to-morrow and see."

"That we will," said William. "I should like to shake him by the hand more than most men. I reckon it is all along of him we are sitting here so comfortable to-night. We will go to-morrow."

As darkness fell the wind began to howl among the orchard-trees of the farm, but it was up on the mountain that its towering strength expended its full force. It raved and rioted about the cottage as at some coveted prey, and each blast that rode up from afar came with voice of fate, or fury, or prophet of ill.

The spirit of the mountains was abroad, the thunder pealed to the echo, the torrent went leaping down the rocks. Hark! a louder blast than ever came up through that tunnel in the hills, gathering over-mastering force as it careered along. It reached the mountain, tore along its side, and with a loud ha, ha! dashed in the door of the cottage and entered.

For some minutes all was confusion, and everything borne in by the wind, or light enough inside, danced a Walpurgis eddy in the centre of the floor. But something in the cottage awed that revel into silence by its presence, and by degrees the wind let go its partners in the dance and slunk away like one abashed or defeated. It was the presence of Death. Stephen Pierrepont lay dead upon the bed, and as the lightning played upon his face it revealed there a mysterious look of triumph and rapture.

Foiled was he? condemned? forsaken? his yearnings after a better life mocked and rejected? Not so, never so. Only sometimes, when such longings are sincerest, God, while accepting the end, rejects the means we have chosen and leads us to it in His own way—it may be by a sharp straight path of agony, but be sure it is the nearest way

home. It may be that all Stephen had dreamed of love and purity and renewed excellence in the mountain cottage under the summer stars, was granted to him in full abundance when his spirit passed in that November storm.

They came up next day to the cottage and found him there, and both William and Mary shed loving tears of compassion as they looked on the thin white face of the dead man.

¶ In his pocket-book they found, with other papers, one giving full particulars as to his family. It was signed by his name, Stephen St. Hilary Farquhar Pierrepont, and they had no difficulty in recognising the handwriting as that of their benefactor.

The clergyman of the parish wrote to Lord Hazlemount, acquainting him with the death of the black sheep of the family; but that nobleman was busy entertaining his friends for pheasant shooting, and had his hands altogether too full to attend much to the news. He certainly broke up the party, all, to a few old friends, and despatched a younger brother to attend the funeral and take possession of the very little Stephen had to leave. As for bringing back the sheep into the family fold, even for interment, it was out of the question. It would be only to open up again that most unfortunate affair, and incur besides such a lot of unnecessary expense.

So Stephen was allowed to sleep under the yews of Torsfoot Churchyard, within sight of the mountain cottage and of Mary's home.

As for the unfortunate affair alluded to above, there is among the many pathetic tales of Hans Christian Andersen, one in which the heroine's vanity for her red shoes leads her into much folly and sin, afterwards followed by repentance and suffering. At last she died: "and then in Heaven," the writer concludes, "no one said a word about the little red shoes." I think that *there* Stephen Pierrepont has been forgiven too.



ABOUT NORWAY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."

A REMARKABLE peculiarity amongst the Norwegians is their apparent ability to do without sleep during the long light nights of summer. At midnight, or at two or four in the morning, they seemed as wide awake as at mid-day. This was so generally the case, that at last I began to wonder whether they took any sleep at all during these months: making up for it, like the tortoise, by burrowing out of sight when the cold and darkness of winter began their reign.

To some extent we were also afflicted with this same malady of insomnia. Night after night the constant daylight and ever-shifting scenes robbed us of all wish and ability to seek the rest Nature has provided for her children. And even in slumber, when tardily wooed and won, there lurked an unpleasant consciousness that it was still broad daylight. Thus when, in due time and place, there came a return to one's natural state of darkness, it met with the welcome reserved for an old friend.

We left Throndhjem about midnight. Twilight wrapped the town and the surrounding hills in silence: twilight that was neither that which precedes darkness nor dawn, but was of a more distinctly weird, unearthly aspect than either. This truly was "neither night nor day." It cast a pale shadow upon the faces of the little crowd of Norwegians on the lower decks, who had escorted their friends to the boat: friends bound for one or other of the ports at which we should touch on our way northwards.

The Norwegians are wonderful people for saying farewell. For so unemotional a race they characterise their partings by a large amount of demonstrative enthusiasm; wringing of hands and embracings, huggings and clasplings, multiplying themselves ad infinitum. So was it to-night, until the captain, half laughing, half impatient, would wait no longer, and blowing the whistle for the third time, ordered the gangway to be withdrawn. Upon which ensued last embraces, tearings asunder, and a scramble for shore. Then all grew suddenly quiet, old men and women, young men and maidens, as they watched us depart: a pale shadow, as I have said, cast by this mysterious twilight upon their ghostly faces. As the men bowed solemnly—as only Norwegians can bow—they might in the silence of this weird light have been saluting phantoms of another world. Half instinctively one looked eastward, expecting that this light not of earth, had thrown back the closed portals, and opened to one's second sight a celestial vision. All above, however, was blank though lovely space.

We hurried out into the broad waters, and were fairly away. The

town receded, the crowd diminished and disappeared, the vision faded, and we went below ; night and darkness now left behind us.

Some hours later, when once more on deck, all sense of mystery had departed with the twilight. The broad, blazing sun was steeping everything in a golden mist that would soon lift and give place to intense noon-day heat. The rocky, barren coast, looked full of beauty and repose in this rarefied air. All that morning we were winding in and out of islands, through narrow channels, where we could almost touch the land on either side, and where the emerald water was so transparent that one longed to plunge into its cool shallows and pluck the treasures that lurked below. Every now and then, as the rocks and islands opened out, we came into full view of the sea, calm and beautiful, hazy with heat, and sparkling with countless sun flashes.

Passing at length through a narrow space, we stopped at Roervik : a picturesque spot more really Norwegian than anything we had seen since leaving Bergen. The houses, overhanging the water and on the slopes, were many of a bright red that harmonised well with the vivid green of the hills in the background : hills so artistically grouped, so full of graceful outline, that it was difficult to believe their arrangement accidental. The boats, painted red and green, lying about the little harbour, added to the liveliness of the scene ; whilst intensely clear and rarefied air threw over all a charm few can realize who have not felt and seen it. One's ordinary life and breathing seemed suspended ; the days passed here must not be counted as days in which we grew older : time was not. Like the sun on the dial of Ahaz, our lives went back ten degrees. It was dreamland : and, for the time being, we were dream people.

We landed two quaint Norwegian carts, took on board a boat-full of boxes, and started on our way to Gudvik : a little spot far less picturesque than Roervik. But in this shimmering atmosphere, this air that almost seemed to endow one with the powers of flying, every place was beautiful ; the smallest house or boat, a speck upon the horizon, the most trifling detail, all became interesting.

After leaving Gudvik we found ourselves for a time more in the open sea. Here we encountered many porpoises, that dodged about and shot under our bows with amazing swiftness. When the first was seen, an excited cry of "A whale! A whale!" was raised. The passengers charged from one end of the vessel to the other, and some of the ladies who had been taking a siesta, hastened up the staircase, with an agonised cry of "Where? Where?" fearing the monster might disappear unseen. Then the porpoise obligingly rolled into sight again for a moment, amidst a universal cry of "There he is!" The ladies excitedly congratulated each other, whilst the men, with a dignity befitting the sterner sex, merely exchanged glances that seemed to say they had not come up to the north seas for nothing.

All this time I had been on the bridge with the captain, and we

were both wicked enough to enjoy the scene and to make no sign. But presently, when more porpoises appeared and crossed our path, a young and pretty American girl who had been silently cogitating for some time, delivered herself aloud of this monstrous and seditious reflection :

"Do you think, sister, that the whale was only a porpoise after all?"

Soon after this little diversion, looking out to sea, we espied what at first was taken to be land and rocks. But as we looked the vision changed and shifted, expanded and contracted, and we soon saw that we were looking at a mirage. For a second time all was excitement. Marvellous as the great whale had been, this was still more so, and certainly was more curious and beautiful. Only in the most intensely rarefied air does the mirage show itself. The water everywhere reflected a white heat and glare; and between us and the mirage the air seemed to waver and vibrate. Rocks and trees were distinctly outlined, now shooting upwards to considerable height, now as suddenly dwarfing. The most curious reflection was that of a vessel in full sail, reversed, so that the masts pointed downwards. Here at last was the phantom ship ready for the dream people: perhaps the vision that the little pale-faced crowd at Thronhjelm had seen and bowed to in the weird midnight light.

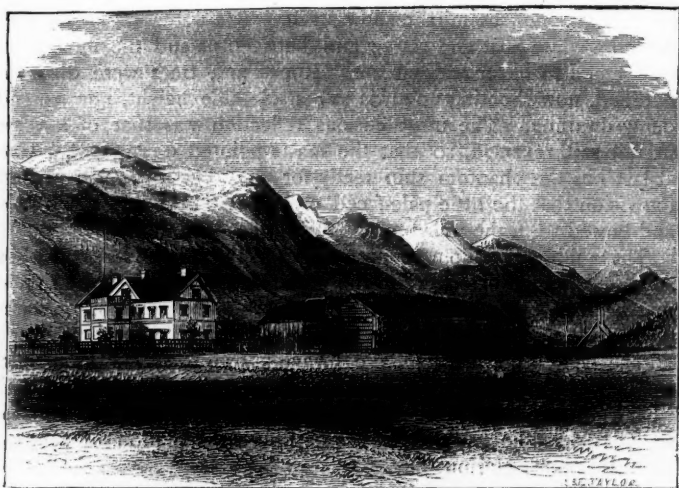
These mirages seldom occur, even up in these latitudes, and whilst some of the men belonging to the vessel declared it to be a sign of fine weather, others affirmed the contrary. The captain, on being consulted, replied with the spirit of a Delphic oracle: "After a mirage I have known it fine, and I have known it wet." Upon which the deputation withdrew with relieved faces, whilst the captain whispered to me: "More often wet than fine, but I would not say so." Perhaps he was right not to cast even the shadow of a gloom upon that most glorious day.

And now in the distance, rising out of the water, we saw the celebrated mountain of *Torghatten*, which possesses a natural tunnel through the centre, showing, even from the ship, a large square opening with a background of sky.

We steered for the mountain, which rises, a gigantic mass of 800 feet, out of the water. The shore at the foot of the mountain is rocky and shallow, and only in fine weather is it possible to land. To-day of all days had been made for the expedition, and towards evening we dropped anchor and went ashore in the ship's boats.

We scrambled on to the rocks jutting out of the water, and so on to land. Terra-firma it could hardly be considered. The chief officer was best acquainted with the bearings of the place, and under his guidance a few of us got safely on to the slopes and began to climb towards the tunnel. Others more self-willed and independent would follow their own course, fell into bogs and marshes, and were finally glad enough to be brought round into a safer pathway.

It was a steep climb of some 400 feet to the tunnel, the way overgrown with tangle and wild flowers. At length we reached the mouth of the cave. An enormous hole or tunnel about 60 feet high at the entrance startled us at the first moment by its huge proportions. The sides were so flat and perpendicular that they might have been cut by human ingenuity. The ground or floor of the tunnel was rough and uneven, strewn with immense rocks and boulders that in the course of ages have fallen from the roof. Few ventured to the other end; the gloomy journey of 530 feet was too rough, and even perilous for want of light, to be undertaken. Yet a few of us went through, and one solitary lady even got half way. Then her courage



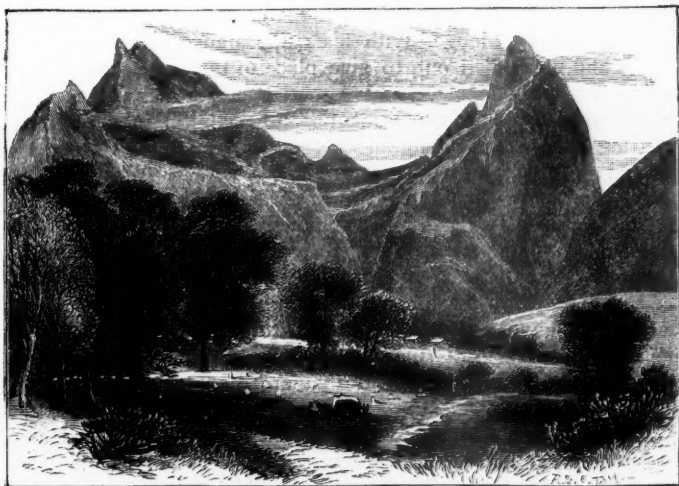
A LONELY SPOT (ROMSDAL).

vanished, and she with it. The tunnel is 60 feet high at the east entrance, nearly 200 feet high in the centre, and 250 feet at the west opening.

From the further end, looking upwards was like gazing into the roof of some grand cathedral of nature; a temple in which the Druids might have performed their mystic rites to the chant of an ever beating sea. Far down at our feet was a tiny house and harbour, and a few boats lying peaceably at anchor. A stone in the wall to our left bore the name of Oscar, and above it a crown, traced by the king's hand. The sea from this elevated point was inexpressibly beautiful, calm as a mirror, expansive, and gaining the repose of evening.

A young flaxen-haired Norwegian who had landed with us had startled us by flying through the tunnel, jumping from rock to rock and stone to stone, almost with the speed of an arrow and the sure-

footedness of the deer. How he did it in the gloom, never pausing a moment, and never missing his mark was a marvel to everyone but himself. He returned almost as quickly. They were now beckoning to us from the other entrance, their forms standing out against the clear background of the sky, the captain's voice with a far-off sound hastening us onwards. But we had not the gift of the flaxen-haired lad, and could attempt nothing in the way of speed over these rough places. A. and Lieutenant X., our German friend, the stoutest yet most active of our party, started to go round the mountain instead of returning through the tunnel, and the chief officer with difficulty persuaded them to abandon the attempt. They



ROMSDALSHORN.

would certainly have been left behind to await our return from the North Cape.

Once more at the entrance of the tunnel, we were glad to see the steamer awaiting our return in patience. Riding at anchor, and floating like a cork upon the waters, she looked a beautiful object, full of life and grace. To reach the foot of the mountain, enter the boats, and once more find ourselves on deck, was a short and easy task. Our visit to this mountain island in the far north had been a very pleasant experience in our journey.

We were soon on our way to the next station, Quello. Again like a golden ball, the sun went below the horizon and the sky was suffused with rosy light. The land, islands, and water—all was steeped in crimson. Where ripples came they came in flashes of red. The sky seemed to reflect almost all the prismatic colours, from crim-

son and dark violet to the purest aqua-marine, loveliest of all tints. Again streaks of flaming crimson flashed across the heaven, changing with every moment. It almost seemed as if these glorious phenomena of nature—I can call them by no other name—spoke to the world in a language for which words were unneeded. If volumes were written about these glorious sunsets in the North Sea ; if all the superlative adjectives were exhausted in their praise ; description would yet fall infinitely short of their beauty. To those who really enjoyed them and felt their full power, it was only possible to gaze in silence—and, if it might be, in solitude : nothing before you but this grand, almost incomprehensible glory, filling you as much with reverence as with delight.

To-night, though not yet within the Arctic Circle, the sun did not disappear for very long. With his reappearance this multitude of shades and tones died out, to give place to the more certain light. Before this, Lieutenant X. and A. had gone down, and indifferent for the time being to the romantic and beautiful in nature, were pledging each other in nothing nearer to nectar than Norwegian beer. It was hard lines upon Herr X., this voyage. When he joined at Aalesund every berth on board was taken, and they had to make up one for him in the saloon, in company with four or five other passengers. Therefore turn in at what hour he might, he had to turn out again the next morning at six, in order that the saloon might be prepared for breakfast. It was hard lines, I say ; but I never found anyone take life so good-naturedly ; take the rough with the smooth so amiably ; submit so patiently to small encroachments upon his rights : encroachments that are quite sure to take place where many passengers are met together, and some, perhaps, exact a little more than their due. Rather an exception to his race, Herr X. was full of gentleness and courtesy. Our chief companion during the voyage, by his intelligent remarks, his keen appreciation of scenery, his humour, and his readiness to join in the laugh against himself in his mistakes in speaking English, he contributed not a little to its enjoyment.

Sunday morning proved as beautiful as ever, the sky as cloudless : so far the mirage had brought no ill-fortune. But the captain had said that if bad weather came it would not be for three or four days. Coming up on deck we found ourselves at anchor at Halsound, an English settlement given up to the timber trade. In this little bay, with the mountains close upon us, we were scorched by the heat and blinded by the glare. Yet the place was quaint and pretty, and from the stacks of pine-wood in the timber-yards came a refreshing scent, wafted to us by the gentlest breeze in the world.

A melancholy incident here cast a temporary gloom over the passengers. Just before breakfast the second steward came up and informed me that one of the steerage passengers had just died. A young man of twenty, who had joined the ship at Christiania, in the

last stage of consumption : so ill that the doctor had feared he might not live to reach home. But he was so anxious to do so that he declared he must risk it : he could not die without seeing once more his father and mother. He had been laid on a bed between the decks, and never came up again. During the two days he remained in Bergen he remained below. Suffocated with heat and longing for air he lay, his cry the whole time, Oh ! that he might live to reach home ! None of the passengers on board knew what was taking place. The whole thing had been kept secret ; and the steward got into trouble for telling the fact when all was over.

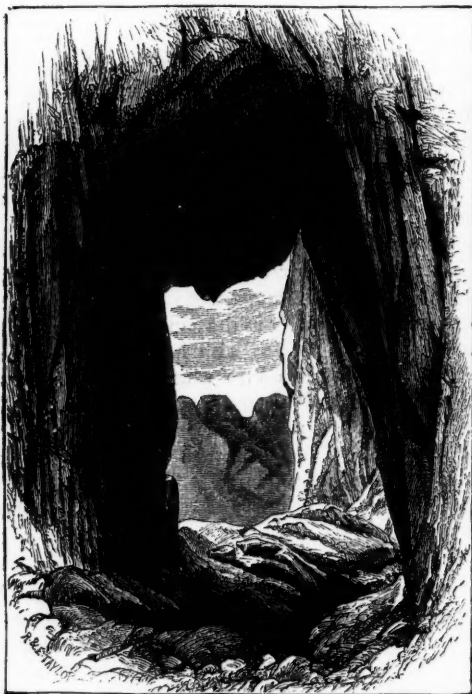
The father had happily come to meet his son and joined him at Thronhjelm. Thus for the last twenty-four hours of his life he was not alone. On the Sunday morning, still longing for home, and almost within sight of it, he died. At Halsound, where we stayed for some hours this Sunday morning, they made him a rude coffin of deal planks nailed together, and laid him out ready for landing at the next station, the home he had so yearned for, and where we were due in the afternoon.

It was a very pretty village this Halsound, shut out from the sea, lying in a sheltered nook. The hills around were beautifully wooded, and patches of snow lay in the crevices and on the tops of the more barren mountains, glistening and gleaming in the sunshine ; a strange, tantalising sight to those who were melting with heat down here in the valley. The stacks of timber sawn into white planks, told us how the people passed their lives and earned their daily bread. A good deal of this we shipped, but the coffin was passed quietly on board through the side of the vessel, unseen by most, and left between the decks with its mournful burden.

About twelve o'clock we went off again, and steaming out of the narrow water were soon once more amongst the islands, with the broad sea beyond. Almost the whole time the coast at our right hand was wild and barren, but very grand ; often rising to the dignity of mountain heights, huge walls and precipices of granite with sharp outlines and long undulations, continually diversified and changing form as the steamer ploughed her way through the waters. Yet though there was much sameness, monotony there was not : this very diversity of form and outline was full of interest, and kept awake the attention.

About three o'clock we reached the poor fellow's home who had died just six hours before. A boat came alongside, and the father got into it. The rough coffin, covered by a small sheet, was gently placed in after him. Bowing gravely to the captain, the man went off with his burden. We watched the boat until it touched the shore ; watched the old mother come out of her cottage and down the rocky slope ; saw her throw upwards her hands and her apron in an agony of despair, as she learned that neither look nor clasp would ever again greet her from her beloved son.

It was a relief to turn once more northward from this melancholy drama to the brighter scenes around us, where all nature sparkled and danced with life and gaiety, and seemed to call upon us to rejoice with her in her happy mood. Just twelve hours after this, at 3 a.m. on Monday morning, we crossed the Arctic Circle, and at the same moment passed the Hestmand on the Island of Hestmandö, or "Horseman's Island," taking its name from the huge mountainous cliff which rises out of the sea, and is supposed to resemble a rider



TORGHATTEN (Portion of Interior of Tunnel).

on horseback plunging through the waters. From one point of view the resemblance is somewhat remarkable, even to the head and cloak of the rider.

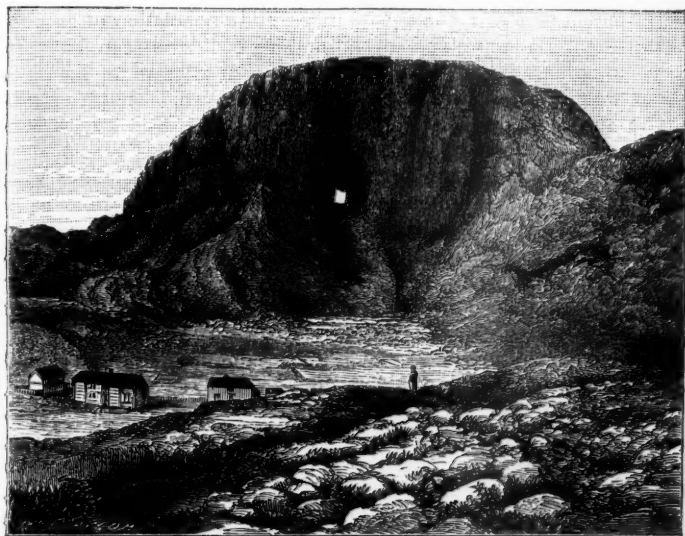
The scenery now became more wild and grand than ever for a time. High mountains covered with snow, whose numberless peaks were tinged with the rosy light of morning, seemed really to stretch backwards into space, whilst amidst them reposed the enormous Svartisen glacier, the blue ice and white snow eternally there, reposing together, yet never mingling and defying the hot rays of

the sun. This enormous snowfield is said to be six miles in length, and from two to four in breadth, and covers a mountain plateau 4,000 feet high, whose glaciers stretch almost to the sea-shore.

About 11 o'clock on Monday morning we reached Bødö, landed and posted letters. A small, quiet town, of growing importance. This might be seen by the large modern wooden buildings that looked very flourishing, and stood out in magnificent contrast with the small and not very clean-looking huts and cottages forming the older portion. Behind the town stretched long, flat, uninteresting

fields. The streets were almost deserted ; perhaps because it was mid-day and the people were at their dinners ; perhaps because the intense heat and glare were not to be lightly encountered even by the natives. So when the ship's whistle warned us that time was up, we were ready to return. These short landings upon terra firma were pleasant interludes in the voyage. The sensation of steady ground beneath the feet can only be appreciated by those to whom a long spell of sailing has rendered it unfamiliar.

Leaving Bødø, we started for the Lofodens, and reached them about 10.30 p.m. On our way we again passed many porpoises, but



TORGHATTEN (From the West).

no one attempted a second time to raise a cry of WHALES. The passengers, on the contrary, rather passed them over in silence, and looked the other way, as if it was felt they had been imposing on one another, and "making believe," though without the courage of the pretty American girl to say so. After all, are we not every one of us children of a larger growth, "making believe" all through life ; laughing most when we are most sad ; shutting our skeletons out of sight, and pretending the closet empty ; putting black for white and white for black, sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet ; acting so well that at last we sometimes come to impose even on ourselves ?

But let us turn to realities : those wonderful realities, the Lofodens. Here at any rate is neither change nor imposition, nor make

believe. As I saw them last year, so, readers, you may see them next. Unchangeable, unchanging. And what a marvellous sight they were. As we approached they stood out boldly before us; rising out of the midst of the sea; massive, granite mountains; a long, unbroken range, with sharp cutting peaks that might have done duty for grand cathedral towers. The whole range, indeed, might have stood for one vast cathedral of nature "measureless to man." High, perpendicular walls, bold and barren, peaks jagged and sharp, rising 4,000 feet above the water; rocks bare and savage, or covered with green lichen only visible on a near approach. The entire length of the Lofoden Islands is about 130 English miles, possessing an area of 1,560 square miles, and a population of 20,000 inhabitants. But as we approached nothing could be seen but this wide, towering, peaked wall of granite. For all sign of life and labour, we might have been hastening to an unknown, untrodden land.

The sun shot down behind these high peaks, the sky became flushed with crimson, the islands tinged with red. The whole view was something almost too glorious for earth. Before us these wild mountains, behind us those snow-hills stretching into space, equally flushed with rosy light. Yet it was some disappointment to see the sun disappear behind the Lofodens. Though there would be no real sunset, and therefore the midnight sun, we should see no sun at midnight. Practically for us the sun had set when he went out of sight.

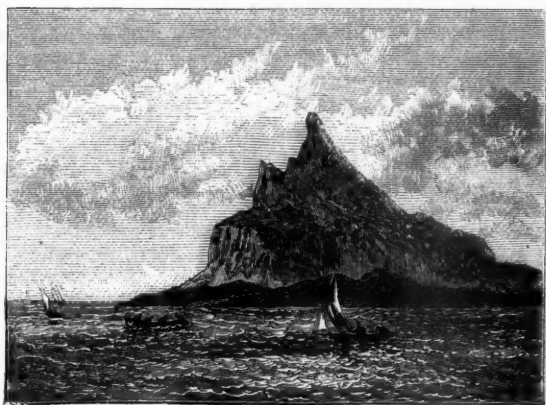
So we contented ourselves with watching the marvellous tones and colours that enveloped us like a glorious heavenly light—or, at least, of some unearthly paradise. The most gorgeous Eastern imagery and imagination could do no justice to these flashing, flickering, changing lights and shadows, the opals and violets, the greens and reds, the rose-coloured tints that flashed and sparkled in earth, sea, and sky, in the very air itself, as if the heavens had been one vast diamond reflecting its countless rays around.

The colours deepened over the Lofodens, which stood out sharply like some northern Dolomites, yet grander in their situation and entirety: revealing themselves, as they did, at one glance. Presently we got close upon them, and steered into a little harbour, where some of the romance was taken out of us by the fearful smell of dried fish which came wafted on the wind: breezes fancy could no longer look upon as rose-coloured or scent-laden. Huge stacks of fish lay upon the rocks, and strings of them were drying in the wind. Above all this, on one of the low green hills, a youth in quaint Lofoden costume was playing upon a pipe, and evidently serenading us. It was a sylvan, musical sound, and the youth lying idly upon the brow of the hill might almost have been an Arcadian shepherd: only that in Arcadia they never could have had this intolerable smell of fish to take the romance out of everything.

But what was our surprise in this far northern island, to hear this

disciple of Pan go through the airs of *Madame Angot*! It was incongruous and out of place. Pan, and the reed, and the Lofodens, all immediately dissolved in a vision of hot London streets, crowded theatres, and unwearying organ-grinders driving one to madness with their inquisitorial horrors. But as we steamed away, with our complement of dried fish in the hold, he returned to his quaint Norwegian melody, dismissed us with a pleasant recollection, rising upon his feet as we receded, and blowing more lustily until we were wafted out of hearing.

At 1.30 in the night, we all landed at Kobervæes, one of the stations in the Lofodens, for the pleasure of a midnight walk, and to see the ruins of the place, which had recently been partly burnt



HESTMAND.

down. Black and charred remains met our sight. An oil factory had taken fire and spread quickly to tenements too ready to fall a prey to the flames. It must have been a strange, sad sight, to have watched the blaze in this out-of-the-way spot. The flames could only be kept from spreading by knocking down some of the buildings, and making a wide gap between the fire and the rest of the village.

That midnight walk in that far-away island left a strange feeling behind it. Night only by courtesy, for here, in the regions of the midnight sun, we had not even twilight. We were steaming amongst the Lofodens all the next day: one of the loveliest, most curious, most interesting days of the whole passage: in and out of sounds and harbours of indescribable beauty, amidst waters dazzlingly transparent: sometimes suffocated by the smell of dried fish, and sometimes choked by the still worse smell of an oil factory, where the black smoke poured out of the chimneys in dense volumes, and darkened our beautiful air for the time being.

On the Tuesday night the midnight sun was really seen for the first time. We had been steering amidst sounds and harbours, and peaks covered with eternal snows, full of the utmost beauty. The sun went downwards in its course, and we watched the changing colours in all their gorgeousness. Then, nearing the horizon, the sun seemed to hover for a moment in mid-air, crept a little parallel with the horizon, and commenced his upward course again.

Nothing could be more certain than the change of colouring between the sun setting and the sun rising; the distinctly different effects of light and tone; though the sun never even reached the horizon. Yet it was palpable and mysterious. Was it because in the one case the light gradually but imperceptibly decreased, and in the other gradually increased again?

We had left the Lofodens when we saw our first midnight sun effect, and were steering for Tromsö, a quaint northern town in the neighbourhood of the Lapps. It was to be almost our last halting-place before reaching the North Cape: where I hope to land the reader in the next paper; but not, if possible, in such weather as we then encountered. The most cruel, cutting wind; the most blinding storm of snow and sleet; the most lowering leaden sky that could possibly have greeted unhappy mortals in the broad light of midnight, any tenth of July, in this nineteenth century of grace.



HIS SUNLIGHT.

Who hath not stood upon some mountain height
 And watched the earth, mist-mantled, grey and cold,
 And longed the veil to lift, and see unfold
 A thousand beauties to his wondering sight?
 When lo! the sun has risen with magic might,
 The mists have melted—mountains grand and bold,
 Fair dimpling vales, and many a peaceful fold,
 All, all are sparkling in the morning light.
 Of us the type; while wrapped in selfish ease,
 Who can discern in us the Godhead's plan?
 Seeking none other than himself to please,
 How poor, imperfect, dark, the soul of man!
 But once *His* glorious sunlight pierces through,
 The mist is gone, and Heaven disclosed to view!

E. L.

MY FIRST SITUATION.

BY LOIS SELBON.

I WAS nineteen, well born, and, as I was constantly being told, beautiful. But what was the use of it all? I was an orphan and poor. My brothers were both married, and though kind in their way, I felt that I could not be dependent upon them.

My education had been excellent, and through it I determined to work. "You are very young, Margaret," said the kindest of my sisters-in-law. Which was true in England, but abroad nineteen is a most respectable age. Besides, each day would rectify that failing more and more. My advertisements for a family in Germany who might require the services of a young lady of many accomplishments and irreproachable family, brought me three answers. I picked out the one that sounded kindest and of which the post-mark was farthest from home, for my brothers' pride was great. It was from a Countess Dahlen. She required a young lady to teach English, French, drawing, and music, to three girls and a boy of various ages, to talk English at odd hours with herself and the Count, and to make herself generally useful and agreeable. Salary to be given: 30*l*. Also the young lady was required directly.

The latter point decided me. I closed with the offer, bid good-bye to my friends, wished a rather sentimental adieu to my native land, and then steadily turned my eyes out to sea, as we steamed into the Channel on our way to Hamburg.

I got as far as Berlin very comfortably. A letter was awaiting me at the Ladies' Pension, to which I had been directed, begging me to meet the Countess Dahlen and her daughters at the East Prussian Railway Station the next morning at eight o'clock. They would all hold their pocket-handkerchiefs in their hands, and I was to do the same.

I was quite ready to start next morning when I was told my droschky was at the door. Preceded by all my goods and chattels, I ran downstairs in excellent spirits and ensconced myself in my droschky, looking forward with some curiosity to meeting my countesses. I was especially anxious to be in good time, for I felt punctuality was an excellent quality in my new career.

What was my disappointment, therefore, to find myself, ere long, at the very end of an immense line of droschkies, four abreast, walking their horses at a snail's pace and occasionally stopping altogether. But by degrees we got on a little, and, meanwhile, I peered into every carriage around for something white. At last! In

the row farthest from me, there are ladies waving handkerchiefs surely. In my excitement I got up for a better view, and found to my chagrin that it was only a baby in white dandled by its nurse. Sitting down again, I noticed for the first time a droschky abreast of mine, occupied by a single individual. This individual was watching me and smiling; that is to say, his lips were smiling, but his eyes were laughing unmistakably, and laughing at me! For the first time I felt that I was alone. How often to be felt again that day! Insulted and angry, I sat down with my back to the ill-mannered stranger, determined to look into no more droschkies, let them be as full of ladies with handkerchiefs as they would.

Soon after this we began to draw up to the station. In a minute my door was pulled open and my luggage seized by a porter. I had no choice but to run after him. In the large entrance-hall I insisted upon his putting down my things, much to his discomfiture, for he was on the point of throwing them into the weighing machine. The crowd of arrivals swayed and surged around me, but though I scanned each face and figure, I tried in vain to recognise the countesses.

Time passed, and I began to feel and, probably, to look anxious and uncomfortable.

"Can I be of any assistance to you, mademoiselle?" said a very pleasant voice behind me, in excellent English.

I turned round gratefully, and encountered the laughing eyes of my neighbour in the next droschky. He had dared to laugh at my anxiety, and my pride rebelled at this insult from a foreigner. I turned very red, and said, indignantly: "No, thank you; I am waiting for friends." He bowed low, and as he moved away I thought I detected the same smile lurking about his mouth. But the crowd was thinning fast—the clock pointed to within five minutes of the hour—what was I to do?

"The Fräulein had better let me take her ticket for her; the ladies have probably been missed in the crowd, and are already in the train; they will all meet at the great junction, where many people have to get out."

This came from the red-capped station-master, who had come up to me, and to whom I had explained my position. "One minute more and the ticket office will be closed," he added, as he saw me hesitate.

"Well, take it, then," I replied, bewildered and perplexed. I was ignorant of the Dahlens' hotel, and, not knowing whether I ought to go or stay, I let his advice carry the day.

The die was cast now, at any rate, for in less than a minute I found my ticket taken, my luggage weighed, and myself being hurried off to my carriage. Whilst the guard and the porter actually lifted me in, I caught a glimpse of my neighbour of the next droschky, looking out of a window higher up.

The train was slow and the stations endless. However, the happy moment arrived at length, when a guard opened the carriage door, shouting, "Gorswald—all change here for Woltersdorf," and out I jumped. Before I could assure myself that all my luggage was out the train was off again. I looked round eagerly. An old woman was hobbling off with a basket, a lady was being embraced by a tender husband, and my neighbour of the next droschky was disappearing within the door of exit towards the town. That was all. No countesses—no one expecting me—nothing! A hot mid-day sun, an insupportable glare, and not a creature who knew one word of English! My courage began to ebb a little, still I mustered all my German and began to explain my perplexities to the station-master. As soon as I got to Graf Dahlen's name, the official's hitherto perplexed face brightened up at once.

"Graf Dahlen!" he cried; "Ja, ja,"—now he knew all about it. "It is to Woltersdorf the Fräulein wishes to go, of course. The Herr Graf lives close by, I know. I will see that the Fräulein gets there." And with this comfortable assurance the station-master politely picked up my bag and showed me the way to the waiting-room.

"In half an hour, Fräulein, the train will start for Fries. May I order you some coffee?"

No, I would have nothing: I was disappointed, tired, and hot. It was evident that now I must give up all hope of meeting the countesses, and make the best of my way to my new home alone. The actual necessity was not as pleasant and did not look as easy as the prospects of getting there "somehow" had been in the morning.

In less than half an hour the polite red-capped station-master was back again. "Now, Fräulein, the train will be up directly. You will get to Fries at six o'clock, and then an omnibus will take you on to Woltersdorf, should the Count not send his carriage all the way to Fries."

"But I never heard of an omnibus," I protested as well as I could: "and are you quite sure about the name?"

"Quite," returned the official rather curtly. "And if the Fräulein heard nothing about the omnibus it was because the Herr Graf is going to send his carriage all the way to Fries." With a polite touch of his cap, he handed me into the train, wished me the stereotyped "prosperous journey," and closed the door.

The afternoon wore on even more slowly than the morning had done. When the Fries station came in sight it seemed as if I had seen the last of Berlin, and heard the last English words from my neighbour of the next droschky more than a week ago.

Once more I was turned out, and the train flew on. This time the station consisted but of a single house and a few sheds. One look showed that no one was here to meet me, for I could take in a mile of country round at one glance. A long, low, hideous conveyance,

labelled "Omnibus to Woltersdorf," was drawn up close to the line, in case any unhappy mortal should wish to ascend into its cavernous interior. I was ushered to its door by an individual, who, to judge from his appearance, did all the dirty work of the station of Fries: and all the clean work for the matter of that, for he was the only living being visible around, with the exception of his dirty little dog who trotted at his heels. Having deposited my luggage on the top, and me in the interior of the vehicle, the Fries man-of-all-work mumbled some unearthly sounds, whilst his dog looked up and barked. I shall never forget the shaking and the misery of that vehicle of torture, the omnibus between Fries and Woltersdorf!

At last there are twinkling lights in the distance and Woltersdorf comes in sight, with its tall church steeple and square-towered town-hall standing out against the evening sky. "At last! Here I shall find some friendly face and voice to tell me what to do." And more dead than alive, I opened the heavy omnibus door and got down the steep steps stiffly, more like ninety than nineteen. The omnibus had stopped at the little post-office to deliver letters, and beneath its orange-coloured lantern stood the postmaster—burly and full of official dignity.

"Any carriage here from Graf Dahlen's?" I managed to say.

"No, Fräulein," was the curt reply, accompanied by a long rude stare.

"But I am expecting Graf Dahlen's carriage," I reiterated. "The ladies of the family were to meet me in Berlin, but I missed them."

Not a word more could I make the postmaster understand. In a few minutes various postboys and idlers had collected round the door, staring and laughing and whispering to each other.

Angry and provoked, I said at last in the plainest German I could muster: "Can you give me a carriage? I must go to Graf Dahlen's at once."

Something like a smile of intelligence broke out upon the burly man's face, and he slowly replied: "A carriage? Ja, ja, and a nice carriage too. Jacob, here, bring out the half-chaise and put the Schimmel into the shafts. The young lady wishes to be taken to Graf Dahlen's immediately."

Meanwhile the lurid sunset was fast giving way to dark, ominous looking clouds, that came up quickly from the East, black as night, making the West orange-colour by contrast. There was a great lull in the atmosphere: not a leaf stirred, and it was oppressively close. I would not go into the little waiting-room, for it was stifling, and I dreaded the look and manner of the host too much. So I anxiously kept out of his way, and walked up and down the silent market-place, musing over my day rather sadly. What would they be like, these countesses, when I got to them? My reverie was brought to a close by Jacob driving up his half-chaise to my side. And then I found out that a "Schimmel" meant a white horse in Germany.

"Now get up, *Fräulein*," was his uncereemonious address. "Your things are in already."

I clambered up a thing resembling an iron ladder more than carriage steps, and managed at last to get into my seat under the large hood. When I was settled and the apron buttoned up comfortably all round, I found that my "half-chaise" was not at all an uncomfortable kind of vehicle. The air was refreshing to my poor hot head, aching as it was, and it was a comfort to get away from that odious postmaster. Jacob was rough, but seemed a good-natured creature in the main. Just as we rumbled out of Woltersdorf the first great heat drops began to fall, and night came down suddenly and laid her pall upon all around. We could hardly see a step before us.

"Why do you not light the lamps, Jacob?"

"Never light lamps," was the civil rejoinder. And I saw it was best to trust the Schimmel and ask no more questions.

It was eight o'clock, and in half an hour more a hurricane came up, the precursor of the storm. Now the rain fell in torrents, and the great poplars by the road-side swayed to and fro like saplings. But of this we only caught glimpses, as ever and anon the blue forked lightning lit up everything round about—only to leave us in greater darkness than before. What with the roar of the thunder, the crashing of the trees and the whistling of the wind, it was an awful night: one that I shall never forget. Jacob cursed and swore at his horse. The poor Schimmel was much alarmed and stumbled wofully in the dark, although Jacob had led him for the last half-hour, lest we should have some accident with all the fallen branches lying in the road.

"Lights at last!" I cried out in delight; "that must be Dahlsburg," and I peered out into the darkness to try and see something of the place. But nothing but distant specks of light, growing bigger every moment, could I see, until a flash of lightning revealed to me—no Castle Dahlsburg, but only a way-side inn, before which Jacob now pulled up, amid many imprecations at the thunder and lightning and weather generally. It was a bitter disappointment, and when Jacob came round and said, "Will the *Fräulein* get out?" I only answered, "No; how much longer to Graf Dahlen's?"

"A good hour or so; it depends upon the storm," and Jacob disappeared within the inn-door, from which issued sounds of boisterous merriment and song. My heart fell. Alone, in a strange country, before a way-side inn at night, with a storm raging above me—it made me shiver a little in spite of the warmth of the night.

Jacob soon reappeared and we continued our journey. Just as the storm was over, and the moon was beginning to disperse the clouds, we turned into a gate, and drove on towards a long, low pile of buildings, in which not a light was visible.

"It must be midnight, and they've all gone to bed!" said Jacob.

I grasped my card-case tightly in my hand, and found my teeth chattering and my voice very shaky, when, in answer to Jacob's loud peal at the bell, after much unbarring and unlocking, a drowsy-looking man opened the door, saying in a grumbling voice: "Well, whatever is the matter this time of night? Ach, Jacob! you, is it? We are all in bed and fast asleep," and he showed evident signs of closing the door and continuing his slumbers.

But before Jacob could answer I managed to say: "Is the Countess Dahlen here?" and held out my card.

"The Countess is not here, but the Count is," added the man musingly. "He is in bed, though, and fast asleep. Must I go up?" The latter was addressed to Jacob, as if for advice. That worthy shrugged his shoulders, and winked and blinked with his eyes—perhaps only at the lamp by which I was being inspected. I cut the matter short by saying peremptorily, "Take this card up immediately." The drowsy man opened his eyes wider than they had been yet, stared hard at me, but withdrew at once, not, however, without carefully closing the door behind him.

Each incident of my day had seemed to be worse than its predecessor, but the ten minutes I had to wait for my messenger's return, put the crowning touch to all. Floods of thought came rolling in upon me. Petted, admired, made much of till so lately—now alone, neglected, insulted, left to wait at midnight for admission to the house where I was to earn my bread! "How unkind, how selfish of them to treat me so: not even to let someone sit up for me! and after not keeping their appointment this morning!" It did seem a hard lot.

Suddenly much rattling down a staircase, swift steps across the hall, and the sleepy porter, now with a smiling countenance, opened the door quickly, unbuttoned the apron, and letting down the steps, said:

"The Herr Graf begs a thousand pardons, gracious Fräulein, that you should have been kept waiting an instant. Unfortunately he is in bed and asleep, or he would be down to welcome you. He only came home himself a few hours ago. The Countess is not here. The Herr Graf will explain everything to the gracious Fräulein to-morrow. Meanwhile I am to take the gracious Fräulein to her room—and here it is, a nice room, is it not so? The Countess especially likes it." By this time my loquacious companion had got himself quite out of breath, and me into a pretty little bedroom on the ground floor, not far from the front door—and, to my astonishment, he was lighting the candles for me, after telling Jacob to deposit my luggage in the hall.

"I think the gracious Fräulein will find all she wants; this room is always kept ready for unexpected guests." ("Then I am unexpected after all," I thought.) "What does the gracious Fräulein command to eat?"

"Nothing, thank you." I had biscuits in my bag—dear English

biscuits ; I quite loved them, they were a bit of home—but I longed for rest too much to be able to eat and drink.

"Then I wish the gracious *Fräulein* a very good night." With which words the guardian of the house closed the door behind him, and I was left to my own thoughts and devices. First I carefully reconnoitred the walls, to see that there were no hidden arras doors, or traps ; then I locked the door and tried to open the window. Alas ! the room was on the ground floor, so I could not venture to leave the long French windows open, for fear of the beasts that I heard barking, and howling, and champing close by : not to mention the buzzing of the mosquitos, that poured in towards the light.

When sleep came to me at last it was accompanied by feverish dreams, in which railway accidents and countesses wrapped in winding-sheets, and grinning postmasters and drunken rioters were mixed up with visions of home. But curiously enough, whenever the dream was wildest and the danger most imminent, the smiling eyes of my neighbour in the next *droschky* rose up between me and destruction. The pleasant, frank face, looking earnestly at me, was the last thing I saw before I was roused by a low tap at the door.

I started up in bewilderment. Where was I ? By degrees yesterday's adventures came back to my mind. The sun was high in the heavens. How late it must be ! what would my employers think of their new governess ? Another tap and a simultaneous opening of the door, which I thought I had locked so well the night before. I stared at it, slowly turning on its heavy hinges, quite prepared to see the gentleman who had ushered me into my bedroom only a few hours before. Instead of this, a small black-robed figure made its appearance ; from under a neat white cap, two bright eyes peered at me wonderingly and inquiringly, and the little person said softly, "May I come in, gracious *Fräulein* ?" at the same time holding out an immense square letter with a large red seal. Having received permission, she closed the door and came close up to my bedside, as if to satisfy herself of my actual existence. "The gracious *Fräulein* will doubtless excuse me ; but the *Herr Graf* said the gracious *Fräulein* would require the carriage at 11 o'clock. It is now ten. The *Herr Graf* had to leave before sunrise this morning : sudden business called him away. Before leaving he told me to give up this letter directly the gracious *Fräulein* should awake." And the little woman handed me the missive most respectfully.

"The Count also said that the gracious *Fräulein* would probably prefer her breakfast in her own room after yesterday's fatigues," she continued. "Shall I bring it in now ?"

"If you please," I answered, feeling more and more bewildered every minute, and the little figure glided out of the room. Why should the "*Herr Graf*" send me all these messages ? and whatever could I want the carriage for at 11 o'clock ? I looked at the letter in all possible ways. It was addressed in a good firm hand to Miss

Margaret Alford. At last I opened it and read the following, in excellent English :—

“Madam,—I feel extremely sorry that the great similarity of names between my brother’s post town and my own, has resulted in your being subjected to the annoyance of being directed to Woltersdorf instead of to Wellersdorf. I can well understand a foreigner being deceived by the sound. As unfortunately I am obliged to leave home almost immediately, I cannot have the honour of welcoming you personally, but shall leave orders for the carriage to be in readiness to conduct you to Schloss Dahlsburg at 11 o’clock to-morrow morning. You will get there towards evening, and a telegram will precede you, so that you will be expected and heartily welcomed.

“Yours faithfully,

“HARRY, COUNT DAHLEN.”

The date was one o’clock of the previous night.

The letter dropped from my hand. A mistake! I had come to the wrong house after all! This was not Dahlsburg, and I must begin a second day’s wanderings in search of my “family.” Tears of pride and mortification sprang to my eyes. To think that I should have to be beholden to strangers for hospitality! and why did the Count do it all? Perhaps there was no Countess—at which thought I felt particularly uncomfortable—but more probably she was too great a lady to think of the affairs of a poor little governess.

At this moment my unpleasant reflections were interrupted by the little black figure reappearing with a tray, which she placed upon a table close to my bedside, begging me to eat, as the way to Dahlsburg was long. But no—I would not touch a crumb in this house into which untoward circumstances had forced me. I would dress with lightning speed and be off. Scarcely, however, had I finished my toilette, than youth and a healthy appetite asserted themselves. I sat down contrary to all my intentions, and made a hearty breakfast, after which things began to assume a somewhat brighter hue. It suddenly occurred to me that, after all, it was kind of this “Herr Graf”—to whom I was an utter stranger, and who could not know that the mistakes were not my fault—to lend me his carriage and make all these arrangements for me. I was sorry I could not thank him, but there was not much more time for reflection. Another rap at the door. This time a loud rap.

“Does the gracious Fräulein command the carriage?”

The gracious Fräulein did command the carriage. Quickly stuffing all my little odds and ends into my bag, I put on my hat and was at the front door just as the carriage drew up before it. The coachman touched his hat, my friend of the night before, now in a neat brown livery, helped me in; the little old housekeeper in black stood at the door, and wished me “a prosperous journey,” and off we were: out of the gates and down the road, out of sight of Warburg

before I had time to feel sure that I was not a second Cinderella being whirled away in the Prince's carriage to unknown regions of bliss. But no, it was I myself, Margaret Alford, travelling along in a luxurious carriage, drawn by a pair of splendid black horses, trotting along as fast as they could on the road to Woltersdorf.

Not long and the little roadside inn came in sight. It looked very commonplace in the broad sunlight, yet the recollections of last night made me shudder a little on passing it. A little while longer and we were at Woltersdorf. We drew up at the little post-house. There stood Jacob ready to water the horses. He did not recognise the occupant of the carriage, for the sun was in his eyes, but off went his cap in an instant to the carriage and the horses.

In ten minutes the coachman was ready to start again, and we were soon bowling along the splendid roads, from which last night's storm had cleared all the dust.

II.

SUNSET again, and with it the coachman points out Castle Dahlsburg before us, with a background of hill and forest. An imposing edifice it looked, and it brought back the reality of life to me with a rush. It was Cinderella going home after the ball. No more independence; no more travelling about in luxurious carriages; no more will of my own. I must become a dependent—there lay my destination close before me. Entering a governess's career looks so easy in the distance, but it is so very thorny in reality!

My heart beat loudly as we approached the gates of Schloss Dahlsburg. The building was large and massive, forming three sides of a large quadrangle, with a grass plot in the middle. We rattled in over the stones, making a great deal of noise. I wished that my entrance might have been more modest. But soon all my thoughts were centred on my coming reception by some ladies who came out on to the steps as we turned in at the gate.

"They think friends are coming—what a pity for me," I thought, skrinkling back into my corner. "How I wish I were at home again!" And then we stopped, and two young girls of about fourteen and sixteen ran down the steps and opened the carriage door.

"Welcome to Dahlsburg," said a voice in English, with a very foreign accent. "My dear Miss Alford, how glad we are to see you at last!" And my hand was taken as I reached the steps by the lady who had spoken. She was tall and statily, with a kind face and very sweet manner.

"Marie," she called out to the elder of the young girls: "Marie, bring in Miss Alford's shawls, dear child, and order her trunks to be brought up to her room at once." Then I knew that I had got to the Countess Dahlen at last, and all my anxieties and fears vanished before her kind face on the doorstep there and then, never to return.

"How tired you must be, my dear; and"—she stopped in the middle of the great hall we were crossing, and took my hand in hers—"it is all through a mistake, and I am more in fault than anyone. I ought to have gone myself to tell you we were going to start by a later train; instead of that I sent my brother's servant. We have long been afraid that he is not trustworthy, and now he has proved himself what we thought. You never received my second letter, did you?"

"Never," I replied.

"Ah, I thought that was it! I hope you will forgive us, dear, and that we may be able to make you forget all the unpleasantnesses of your journey. Could you sleep last night? My brother-in-law telegraphed to us that you had been wrongly directed, and that you had got to Woltersdorf instead of to Wellersdorf. I do think the name ought to be changed." And so the kind lady went on talking till we reached my room.

"I hope you will be happy here, and stay with us a long time, my dear," were her parting words, as she was about to leave the room with her daughter.

I went up to her, and took her hand within my own. "It is more like coming home than anything I could have imagined," I was just able to say, for I had a choking sensation in my throat that took away my voice. How good everyone was to me! How different from what I had expected!

III.

A WEEK passed. Nothing could exceed the kindness of all the inhabitants of Castle Dahlsburg. I had plenty to do, but I liked that, and my pupils and I were fast becoming friends. I had told my adventures to the assembled family on the evening of my arrival, and elicited both laughter and tears—real tears from the Countess Dahlen. "Poor child," she said, stroking my hair; "what escapes you had through that mistake! Thank God, you fell into good hands." After which my journey had not been reverted to again.

One morning I was greeted at breakfast with cries of: "Miss Alford, Miss Alford, Uncle Harry is coming to-day: ar'n't you glad? We are," said one of the little boys. "He is so jolly, and does speak good English, doesn't he, mamma? Better than papa even."

"They both speak well, dear; and no wonder, when your grandmother was English. That is why I want you all to speak English especially well, you know."

The Countess was called out of the room, and we all dispersed to our several avocations immediately afterwards. When lessons were over, Marie and I went out for our usual walk. We crossed the garden to get into the village, and then Marie found out that she had forgotten a book she wished to take to a sick woman.

"Run back, dear; I will wait here for you," I said, and back she ran.

She was gone longer than I expected, and I stood looking over the low hedge into the road. Presently I heard steps approaching. Long quick strides they appeared to be, and up came a gentleman with a large straw hat on, completely shading his face. He carried a good stout stick in his hand, and had walked fast and far, to judge from his dusty appearance. He was just about to pass the spot where I stood, when a bark from Marie's little terrier made him look up. Off went his hat in an instant, and with the laughing eyes and the pleasant smile I remembered so well, my neighbour of the next droschky bowed to me, and passed on. It was all the work of a moment. I had barely time to return the pleasant greeting, before a turn in the road hid him from my view. I know not why, but when Marie came back with her book, I cared to talk about the incident as little as I had cared to mention my rude neighbour of the next droschky when narrating my adventures.

On our return, we saw a travelling carriage driving up the road before us. The next minute it turned into the Dahlsburg gates. "There's Uncle Harry! I thought it was his carriage," cried Marie. "Dear Miss Alford, do let us be quick; I think I must run." And off set Marie, tearing along the road at a great pace. I followed more demurely, making up a little German speech of thanks the while for the hospitality shown me at Warburg, and thinking a good deal of this morning's encounter with the stranger of the laughing eyes. I was so much engrossed in my thoughts, wondering if ever he would cross my path again, that I had nearly got up to the steps where I had seen the kind Countess and her daughter awaiting me on the evening of my arrival, before I saw Marie, with all her brothers and sisters, coming down towards me with a stranger in their midst.

"Here she is," they cried. "Uncle Harry wants to be introduced to you, Miss Alford."

"Now that you are no longer in need of any assistance, I hope you will allow me to introduce myself," said the pleasant voice, that was still ringing in my ears. I looked up, and beheld my friend of the next droschky.

"You Count Harry Dahlen?" I exclaimed, my astonishment making him laugh and the children stare.

"Count Harry Dahlen at your service, at all times and in all seasons, though you do not make it easy to serve you," he added with a smile, and bowing low.


Then everything I had forgotten in my surprise and pleasure, rushed back upon my mind. My curt answer in Berlin; my arrival at midnight and arousing the Warburg house; my turning its master out before dawn; for I saw it all now intuitively—and then the kind requital on the following day! My sentence of thanks died away

upon my lips, and I stood before Count Harry like a silly school-girl at the mercy of her master. Again he came to my rescue, chivalrous knight that he was, and asking me if I were not home-sick, he led the conversation far away from Germany and gave me time to overcome my evident confusion. We walked round and round the grass plot, as we often did towards evening, and then the Countess Dahlen came out and joined us, but Count Harry still kept by my side.

It is long since I left Castle Dahlsburg. They were all so good to me when I went home! "There will never be another Miss Alford for us, dear child; how we shall miss the bright face," said the kind Countess, when she kissed me on the very step where I had seen her first a year before. "But Warburg is not far off, and you have promised to come and see us often."

"That she shall," came from the pleasant voice that had haunted my dreams ever since that eventful morning at the Berlin station. So far off now! "That she shall! This shall be her first visit after I bring her home from England this day six weeks. This day six weeks, young lady, remember that; and no delays for trousseaux and that kind of thing," he added energetically.

And thus it happened that I came to live at Warburg after all. It is barely three years since I saw it first, but I often think that it must have been in some previous state of existence—life has so changed for me. Harry says, he knows that his real life began the morning he saw an anxious little face ("lovely," the silly fellow persists in putting it) peering eagerly into every carriage, and then looking so proud and distant at the offer of help from a stranger, notwithstanding its perplexities. He says he knew instinctively who it was that came up to his door on that stormy August night—even before he had assured himself of the fact by peeping over the banisters to see the owner of the anxious little face conducted to her room. He felt even then that a change had come to his life. And he laughingly adds that he shall henceforth be a firm believer in love at first sight.



ADELAIDE PROCTER.

ON the 30th of October, 1825, the first cry of a baby girl was heard in a house in Bedford Square. Though the house was a poet's house, there was nothing especially musical in the sound, and no one thought of predicting that, from that little new-born infant, was to flow forth a sweet ripple of song, that was to make many minds bright, and many hearts glad.

It was little wonder that the tiny maiden, whose small feet were soon trotting about the poet's home, grew to have a taste for literature. Her father murmured over half-polished lines as she sat on his knee; her mother discussed a new book as she bent to tie her darling's sash; men, whose names were known all over Europe, stroked her pretty curls, and were her willing slaves and playfellows in many a merry game. Such a taste she did acquire as easily and insensibly as other children acquire a liking for using their tongues and limbs.

Thus little Adelaide, the daughter of the man with two names—Barry Cornwall they called him in the thousand homes where flashed in, like a watched-for, friendly meteor, the fire of his verse; Procter they called him in the few privileged homes where his voice was a loved, familiar sound—thus little Adelaide grew on, breathing in high mental culture with the very air and sunshine, breathing in, too, a pure atmosphere of noble thought and generous, lofty feeling, until she began to show a most decided turn of mind towards what were to be the pursuits of her future life.

When Adelaide entered the school-room, she soon showed a remarkable brightness and quickness in all her intellectual faculties. The moment she began to take in hand any branch of learning, her mind went straight into the heart of it with a needle-like sharpness and precision that often surprised her teachers. Directly one new acquirement was made, her restless little brain at once longed to rush on to another. When the kingdom of French grammar had been successfully won, she passed on to storm the stronghold of the German declensions; when the dancing lesson was over, she was quite ready for her music-master. In this early stage of her story, as in its later chapters, there was nothing so contrary to Adelaide Procter's nature, as sitting down with folded hands by the way-side of life. Her memory was strong and capacious; nothing that she read and learned seemed to come amiss to be stored away in it. It took in, and retained, with equal ease, the first books of Euclid, and the last sprightly shred of verse she picked up from the pages of her favourite annual.

Yet it must not be supposed from all we have said of Adelaide Procter's activity in study at this early age, that she was a silent,

grave girl, who was always wrapped up in a cloud of book-learning ; such would be a very false picture of her bright, winsome, gracious youth. No laugh was merrier in its clear music of ringing gladness than hers ; no foot bounded more freely and lightly across the grass, when her parents took her for long happy expeditions on golden summer days into the country ; no saucy, tricky girlish tongue was more ready with playful fireworks of fun. Her presence at this period in her home was, for the whole household, one ray of sunshine, and cadence of cheery melody.

One picture taken from these early pages of Adelaide Procter's history stands out clear and bright before us. A loved and honoured guest is expected in the house in Bedford Square to-day ; we can read this in the quiet joy that sits enthroned on Barry Cornwall's brow ; in the eager earnest movements of the mistress as she hastens hither and thither ; in the important looks and meaning smiles of the servants ; they even strive to make little Adelaide a thought prettier than usual, if that is possible, by putting her on a fresher and fairer frock than common. At length the door-bell rings, the master hurries out with words of glad, yet reverent welcome : a minute after a tall, spare, elderly man, with a brow that looks as if it were the native palace of genius, with eyes that turn in deep tenderness on the most commonplace things in God's creation, as though they could pierce to an inward and spiritual beauty in each, was standing in Mrs. Procter's drawing-room.

The sympathetic talk rolls on from theme to theme, now grave, now gay, changeful as the lights and shadows on the sea in spring time, until by-and-by the trio, host, hostess, and guest, are disturbed by a soft tap at the door. In an instant a little figure is gliding up the room ; her movements are very noiseless, as though she were treading in a consecrated place ; there is awe in her face as she turns it towards the stranger, and yet there is a great, wondrous light in her eyes.

The guest stretches out his hand kindly, but at first she takes it very shyly, and stands with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks ; but gradually his voice and looks draw her closer and closer, until at length she is sitting on his knee, telling him in simple, childish phrase that she does so love some of his poems, and can repeat such and such a one by heart. As he listens, a prescience of what she is one day to be rises up within him, and William Wordsworth speaks words of steadfast yet tender teaching, that to her dying day will not be forgotten by Adelaide Procter.

Other men of mark besides Wordsworth were counted among the friends of Adelaide Procter's early childhood. Her young face, with heart and mind twinkling in every feature, was a joy to look upon, and they delighted in it, as well as in her bright, merry talk, which very soon began to sparkle with wit unusual for her years. Charles Dickens was one of the most frequent and well-loved of these visitors,

and one whom Adelaide early grew to regard with warm liking; but though he was to be the first person to usher her into the realm of print, he had no notion at this period that any talent for poetry was in her.

Thus time passed on, till Adelaide had crossed the boundary between girl and woman. She had a face that shone with the beauty of the soul; she had an intellect that rejoiced in the use of its own keen faculties; she had a heart that burned to right the wronged and lift up the fallen; she had eyes that looked deep down into the dark places of human life with a pitying angel's gaze, which, steadfast in its own radiant purity, can weep for the erring and the misled. Her religious feelings and convictions had always been very earnest, bringing themselves into the practice of her daily life, and writing themselves there in acts of self-denying love and mercy; her brilliant imagination and starry faith had always made her inclined towards the gorgeous and rich in outward form of worship. She had a favourite aunt who was a Roman Catholic, and when she was about twenty-five she joined the Romish communion, of which she was a firm and reverent member till the end of her earthly life.

At length the music, that had been long slumbering in her nature, woke up and found its way into verse. Daughter of an author as she was, and used to the society of authors in familiar daily intercourse, she naturally enough began quickly to cherish a longing to reach the ear of the public. But how was this to be done? Her refined and sensitive feelings shrank from the thought of any of her father's literary friends taking her poetry into their magazines merely out of civility, while in reality they found no merit in it, and regarded it as a dead-weight which friendship forced their periodical to carry. By-and-by, however, she resolved what she would do.

One day Charles Dickens, as he sat in the office of "All the Year Round," making his way through the mass of papers that lay on his table, was attracted and surprised by the singular merit of some lines which had been sent him. Such a discovery is always a refreshment to an editor, as he wades among the slough of manuscripts which surround him, and he glanced eagerly at the name with which the verses were signed. It was "Mary Berwick." Dickens had never before, to his knowledge, either heard this name or seen it in print, but there was the ring of true poetry in Mary Berwick's lines, be she whom she might, and so they were inserted in the next number of the magazine.

Months went on, and "All the Year Round" had frequent contributions of Miss Mary Berwick among its contents. Dickens, however, knew simply nothing about her, except that she wrote a legible hand, that he always, by her own wish, addressed all communications to her to a certain circulating library in the west of London, and that when he sent her a cheque she acknowledged it promptly, but in a very short, matter-of-fact way.

At length, one winter evening, when Dickens went to dine with the Procters, he happened to put in his pocket, to show them, the Christmas number of "All the Year Round," which was just coming out. He called their attention especially to what he said was a very pretty poem by Miss Mary Berwick. The author of "Pickwick" remarked, to his astonishment, that these simple words of his were received by the whole family with much suppressed merriment. He could not in the least make out what was in the wind, but he took it good-naturedly, supposing it to be some home Christmas joke, and asked no questions. Next day the mystery of the unaccountable mirth of last night was cleared up in a letter from Barry Cornwall to Dickens. Mary Berwick was Adelaide Procter. And from that time forward Miss Procter took an acknowledged place among English poetesses.

A very bright episode in Adelaide Procter's story was a visit she paid about this time to the Roman Catholic aunt before mentioned, who was now living in a villa near Turin. With all the lively earnestness of her character she threw herself into the study of Piedmont and its people. She climbed the mountains with the active grace of a chamois, and seemed to tread on air, as she reached the free glory of the summits; she made her way into the homes of the villagers, and sat chatting in the porch of the Presbytère with the good Curé, or laughed and played with the dark-eyed children in the sunny gardens. Her whole nature was poured out in enjoyment of the new world around her, her whole spirit seemed to sparkle with brilliant animation. Her letters home at this period were a reflection of her state of mind and feeling, and overflowed with graphic description and many-coloured fancies.

After a long stay in Piedmont, Miss Procter went back to her London home, where there was always a full choir of love to greet her. She continued to write poetry that made its way with power and sweetness into English brains and hearts, but she did not give up her life to literature alone; she did other and noble work for her fellow men. Her graceful form and sympathetic voice brought light and music to the wards of many a hospital; the children in the ragged-school looked up into her face, to see at once the mother and the playfellow in her eyes; the sick and dying, in chill, gloomy garrets, knew and blessed the ministry of her gentle hand. In every work of mercy with which the heart of the great city throbbed her name was among the first; in scenes of sin, in scenes of wretchedness, she stood radiant in her Christian love, as one of God's brightest seraphim, holding up the cross for eyes darkened with guilt or sorrow to gaze upon. She laboured earnestly for her own sex, not with the female emancipation cry upon her lips, but with the genial heart of a true woman, who knows what women want, and would make their field of usefulness at once higher and wider and holier.

Yet with all this far-spreading work, which was ceaseless in its un-

wearying effort, and with all her devotion to her art as a poetess, devotion which is proved by the tuneful sweetness of every line she wrote, Adelaide Procter never gave herself the airs of a woman of business, who had no time to give to friendly intercourse in general society. There was no more popular guest in London drawing-rooms than she, her manners were so modest and gracious, her wit was at once so playful and so bright. Her old girlish readiness of tongue never forsook her, and her quickness in lively repartee shone often like the harmless flashes of summer lightning. In her home she was still the sunny fairy she had been in her early youth; wherever she went among her relations and closest friends it was as a refreshing breeze gliding into the house; her whole nature was as far from anything morbid and self-absorbed as a silver moonbeam is from the artificial light of a closely curtained ball-room.

It was a life rich in many-sided work for God and man, but it was a life which could not fail sooner or later to wear out the body in which the loving, eager, active spirit dwelt. Her whole being was put into everything she did; her whole heart went out in sympathy towards all she helped or lifted up. It was impossible but that such pouring-out of herself must tell upon her physical constitution. The picture of her earthly meridian is a very lovely picture, it is so full of warmth and light and softly blended colour. But, alas! too soon it fades. Gradually the sweet face grew haggard, gradually the brisk step grew slower; they strove to make her spare herself, but they might as well have striven to keep the wind from blowing, or the streams from running. Active work was a law of her nature. She continued to write poetry and to struggle bravely to help others, hiding, all the while, pain and weakness with a merry laugh or a cheery word, until, at length, not even her strength of will and high spirit could keep her up any longer, and she was obliged to give up from sheer want of bodily power.

For a year and a quarter she lay on her bed, sweetening and brightening the heavy time for herself and all around her by words of faith in God and words of love to man. There was never a sound of complaint in that sick room: there was no invalid's selfishness there to cast a shadow; it was all one long unbroken strain of patience and cheerfulness. Her lively interest in the good of others did not flag, her smile made still sunshine for those who loved and watched her; the playful words of days of health were still often upon her lips.

At length, when she was thirty-nine, the angel came to bear her up to God. Softly she bade her mother raise her, and the loved arms, that had been her refuge in every childish sorrow, were around her neck. Then, with the brightness of heaven already in her face, she whispered a word of farewell, and went to her Father above.

ALICE KING.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF IT?

THE world is almost divided between two kinds of people, those who make wonders out of nothing, and ignore all the discoveries of science, and those who dwell so securely within their own narrow knowledge, that they forget the vast domain that no human mind has yet explored, and feel wiser than Shakespeare, and quite sure that there are *not* more things in heaven and earth "than are dreamt of in *their* philosophy." They refuse to any new fact the courteous entertainment Hamlet advised, when he said, "as a stranger give it welcome." But there still remain a few, not credulous, but patient, such as would have listened when Galileo propounded his new theories of the earth's motion, or Stephenson planned his first railway-engine. It is to such that I wish to tell my little story, every incident of which happened, exactly as I shall tell it, to people who are still living—I myself, the least really concerned, strangely happening to hold in my hand the gathered skein of which most of the real actors have but a single thread.

I was not in the first scene. It is laid in a London drawing-room about the year 1864. The dramatis personæ consist of an old gentleman and his daughter, whom we will call Mr. and Miss Escott, and a young minister, whom we will know by the name of the Rev. Thomas Clark. The three were discussing Spiritualism, which was just then rather prominently before the public. Their individual views on the subject were then, as I have since learned, much what they remain to-day, and may be briefly set forth thus:

Old Mr. Escott was inclined to believe implicitly in the theory of disembodied spirits acting through media, by table turning, automatic writing and the like, and in his enthusiasm was eager and persistent in his investigations.

On the other hand, Miss Escott, a highly cultivated and thoughtful lady, preferred to hold her judgment in suspension. Had seen wonderful things quite beyond her power to explain, but did not think them therefore incapable of explanation. Had had some singular personal experiences. Believed that people in dealing with the matter should feel something like a man trying an unknown and unlabelled medicine-chest in which there may be deadly poisons.

The Rev. Thomas Clark had not very definite ideas on the matter, having recently come from the country, and not having seen or heard much of it, but his opinion was that the strange results were brought about by occult and unconscious action of human minds one upon the other.

While this conversation was going on, a visitor was announced as "Mrs. Amory," and there came into the drawing-room quite a young

lady, evidently new to matronly dignities. She had a sort of prettiness, which was not beauty, and certainly owed nothing to intellect or strength of character. The pouting red mouth would grow shapeless and animal as soon as the freshness of youth had departed, and an enemy might have called the wide blue eyes vacuous, though friends called them "pathetic." If she had taken off her hat, she would have revealed that the back of her head was mean and poor. Yet ninety people out of a hundred, looking at her, would have said, "What a lovely girl!" For her complexion was delicate, her abundant hair bright and waving, and her figure tall and elegant. Kind-hearted Miss Escott made a sort of pet of her, and had a curious faith in her possibilities. For just as she held a cheap reputation for beauty, so she held another for genius. She could do so many things, almost well, apparently without labour or effort, that one felt inclined to wonder what she could do with these.

Her name and Mr. Clark's were murmured over in the ordinary manner of society introductions, and old Mr. Escott whispered aside to the young clergyman that she was an orphan, and had recently married into the family of a distinguished artist. She took a seat beside Caroline Escott, and presently the conversation returned to its former channel.

She entered into it with gusto, taking sides warmly with Mr. Escott, who was delighted to find such a champion. She asserted her own "mediumistic powers," which she had known for a long time, and which at one time she had practised considerably, but which she had been forbidden to exercise by the people with whom she had lived before her marriage. Mr. Escott, delighted at such an opportunity for convincing his sceptical clerical friend, instantly proposed an experiment, and brought forward a small table, at which he seated her and Mr. Clark to await "a message," either by "raps" or "automatic writing" as the "spirits" should suggest. The "spirits" were not long in coming to a decision, and, if I recollect rightly, they chose automatic writing—for I will not be precise on any point of which I am not quite sure, and this interview, remember, was only reported to me some years afterwards.

A very little more waiting brought forth a message. I could never get the exact words of this message. From all I could ever gather it was of the ordinary kind, conveying a rebuke to Mr. Clark as to some of his mental attitudes. Nothing more. Everybody arose, confirmed in their pre-conceived opinions. Mr. Escott was delighted, and Caroline Escott and the Rev. Thomas as doubtful as ever, though in widely differing ways—the lady being serious and feeling cautious of unknown possible dangers—the gentleman inclined to treat the affair with ridicule and banter. Mrs. Amory went away almost immediately, and was, she says, never sure of her fellow-sitter's name, and remembered him only as a "young minister."

I must repeat that all I know of this interview is what was

reported to me after the lapse of nearly ten years, when sufficiently significant circumstances made it memorable to three of its actors. From each of these three I heard its story, and though two of them had certainly never seen each other from that time, their reports did not vary.

In the course of the following few years, the young man got involved in sundry theological discussions which caused him to leave the very narrow sect to which he had originally belonged. He would be thought but a mild heretic to-day, but even ten years ago heresies on very minor points were held serious matters. And the young man continued for a long time adrift, without any charge of his own, but occupying himself with helping such ministers of divers dissenting persuasions as did not repudiate his assistance.

It was at this time (about 1872) I was first introduced to him by Miss Escott. The story of the courage with which he had given up his charge and cut himself adrift on the world for conscience sake was naturally interesting. But the man himself did not suggest a hero. He was a quiet-mannered, rather sleepy-looking individual, given to converse with an affectation of strong special interest in his interlocutor. He used this mannerism with everybody, old or young, male or female, quite impartially. Nevertheless, when it happened with young ladies, it laid him open to a suspicion of philandering: that is to say, their friends suspected this, while the young ladies themselves felt adored.

He did not stay long in London at that visit, and while he did stay he lived in the Escotts' house. Mrs. Amory was not in London at the time. That I know. For at this date I had known her for many years, and Caroline Escott for two or three.

He left London to take ministerial duty in a quiet little inland town in Scotland. He was to take charge for a year, during the absence of the regular minister. Probably he found his position dull enough. He lived in lodgings and necessarily spent most of his evenings alone. His reflections, too, could not have been of the liveliest. He had no real outlook in life, and he was engaged to a minister's daughter, whose father demurred to the young man's theological opinions.

It was in the course of this year that Caroline Escott, with whom he constantly corresponded,—they being old family friends—received from him a very remarkable letter. Wisely or unwisely, but very naturally and very fortunately for this story, she showed that letter to me.

In that letter he narrated that one evening—that of the third Friday in October—sitting as usual at his tea, and beguiling his solitude with a book, he looked up suddenly, and on the opposite side of the table saw the figure of "the young lady with whom, many years ago, I tried a spiritualistic experiment at your house. Probably you have forgotten the incident," he wrote, "as I have forgotten the

lady's name, but you may possibly know who I mean when I add that I recollect your father telling me that she had then recently married the kinsman of a famous artist. I forget the celebrity's name as well as the lady's." He went on to say that, looking at the figure, he knew it was not real, and that, without any pretence of hearing a voice, "it gave him to understand," by some strange transfusion of ideas, that the person it represented was utterly and entirely miserable, and in great danger. "Do you still know the lady?" he wrote, "and can you tell me whether there is any basis for this vision, or whether it is as wild and incomprehensible in matter as in manner?"

Now Caroline Escott is a simple straightforward person, with more faith in human nature than subtle knowledge thereof. Her own walk in life had been clear and above-board, and probably she had never known a trouble which she would not, under fair circumstances and for reasonable cause, have frankly admitted. She took an early opportunity of seeing Mrs. Amory, and asking her whether, for the sake of psychological investigation, she could throw any light on the Rev. Thomas Clark's vision. He gave its very date—had she been ill at that time, or depressed, or worried by having to make a decision about any important matter?

Mrs. Amory laughed the idea to scorn. She had been as she always was, she said. Nothing had been wrong either within herself or in circumstances around her. Caroline Escott wrote to me, rather dismally, that here was another instance not only of the uselessness, but of the absolute misleadingness of these strange phenomena. She wrote similarly to Thomas Clark, and he was sorely disturbed to have been the victim of so deluding a phantom.

In the January of the following year the Rev. Thomas Clark came to London to engage in unsectarian mission-work. We saw a great deal of him in our houses, and I was more than ever convinced of his weak character and subtle brain. Yet he was patient and faithful in the discharge of his duties, and kind and sympathetic to his poor people. I have known him take down his own railway rug to wrap a sick child, whose need he had only known when it was too late to procure a blanket. But one always felt his lack of force. He was the leaf which is blown by the wind, not the wind which blows. It is curious that, though he came of a good English stock, he had an oriental face and might easily have passed for one of themselves among the fate-believing "sons of the Prophet." I often wondered whether the love-affair of some Crusading forefather could have left its mark on the breed, both in face and blood.

About this time Mrs. Amory began to pay me marked attention. We seldom visited each other—indeed, I may say we never did so. I had not been in her house since my own marriage and she had never been in mine. Our meetings were casual ones at the house of a mutual friend. I could never help feeling a sort of liking for her,

and yet I had no faith in her. She was always kindly and even complimentary in her manner and remarks, and yet I always left her feeling unhappy. Years had not produced a favourable effect on her. She continued to look curiously young; time, instead of giving her lines and wrinkles, had only given her flesh and coarseness. She did not look like the middle-aged woman she was, but like a blowsy girl. She resembled nothing so much as a bulgy rose, gathered after wet weather. She had suspended all exercise of her pretty gifts, and people no longer said what she might be, but what she might have been.

She began to draw me away for tête-à-tête talks. Caroline Escott's name was often brought into the conversation. Presently she began to ask if I knew a friend of Caroline's—a gentleman engaged in mission work. I answered, cautiously enough, you may be sure, that I did. She had seen him once, long ago; and from something she had heard lately he seemed a very remarkable person, she said. I rejoined that he appeared to me an ordinary, harmless young man. Not at all ordinary, she thought. Would I tell her his name? It was so awkward to have to speak of him as the "the gentleman I met years ago." I told her I presumed she meant the Rev. Thomas Clark. The name recalled nothing to her, and she began to rehearse one or two points of personal appearance which she could remember, that we might be sure we were talking of the same person. I was certain there was no mistake about it, but was inclined to change the conversation.

Why she chose to make a confidante of me, is another mystery of this mysterious story. Our acquaintance, though long, had been of the most superficial kind. She had always given me to understand that, from her point of view, I was an unromantic, hard-headed creature to whom sentiment would seem folly, and from whom weakness need expect no quarter. Yet then and there, boldly and in haste, for fear of interruption, she told me the story of Thomas Clark's vision, as Miss Escott had related it to her, adding, "Of course I told her it was all nonsense, there was nothing in it. But there was. What it gave him to understand was true."

I suppose my rejoinder was characteristic. I could not help pitying her manifest distress, but neither could I refrain from saying, "Are you sure that your feeling is not the result of the fact? Is it not possible that you are magnifying some ordinary feeling of depression because you have heard that, by some accidental coincidence, some incomprehensible phenomenon connected itself with you?"

"No," she said; "and even you could not think so if you knew all. But I was not going to admit this to Caroline Escott. I don't think I should like Mr. Clark to know, and yet I should so like to see him. Is he often at your house?"

"Yes," I said, quite determined, even at that stage, that no meet-

ing between them should take place with my knowledge. And I added what was quite true: "He comes at all hours; we can never reckon on his visits."

"I wish you would come and stay a day with me," she said. "You remember what a nice long day we had once before you were married? Come again and have such another. I am by myself the whole day, from the time Mr. Amory goes to office till he returns, and I am so dull. I have no real friends."

She looked mournful enough. I was touched to think of the bright, pretty girl whose life had seemed so sunshiny in bygone years, when mine had been hard and stern enough. And she had always had a smile and a pleasant word for me then. And now I was so happy, and she seemed so wretched, that I felt as if I had somehow wronged her. I promised to go, and she fixed the day and hour.

I have little more story to tell. I paid my promised visit, and was with her from noon till about six in the evening. I can only say that, for months after, the memory of that day remained with me like a black wall drawn across the sunny fields of my life.

For six hours, with scarcely a moment's pause, did that unhappy woman pour out the miserable story of her life. There had been unfortunate circumstances, no doubt, but even the most pitying eye could not refuse to see that the one pervading misfortune had been her own weak, wilful, wrong-headed self. She spoke with utmost bitterness of some for whom she still outwardly professed honour and love. Without doubt her early life had been considerably misguided and wasted: much that had been intended as kindness had been cruelty, because misdirected; but over and over again one felt that a true and vigorous nature would have found sweet nutriment where she turned all into gall and wormwood. Of later years, her days had dragged on in apathetic indifference, without one warm affection or one real duty—a seething storm within her, and utter stagnation without. An outburst was sure to come, sooner or later. It came in the October of the vision. But here my pen must pause. It is not for me to tell a story of weakness, and shame, and sin, that was poured into my bewildered ears in an agony of remorse that should be as sacred as any seal of confession. Suffice it to say that there came a point when she had to choose between all that makes life worthy, or all that makes it shameful. She chose rightly. She said so. She did not deny the sin of her heart; but she swore, with blinding tears, that it never passed into her life. In such a mist of degrading misery had she been lost, that she could not recall the exact date when she had the terrible choice. She could remember that it was on a Friday in October, but whether it was the second or third Friday she could not tell.

That was an awful day; but it came to an end at last, and as I walked home in the sweet peaceful sunset of early spring, I felt as if

I had awakened from a horrible, fevered nightmare. I have often seen Mrs. Amory since, but never by a single word has she alluded to the secret which she knows lies between us. But in crowded drawing-rooms, where she has been moving about with her lazy, sumptuous gracefulness, taking the sentimental view of everything, I have often felt her suddenly watching me.

She never again met the Rev. Thomas Clark. We are all scattered now; and when I think of the minister's circumstantial story of the phantom of a woman he scarcely knew, and of the circumstantial verification thereof, known only to myself, I can but ask the question of my title—"What is the meaning of it?"



MIZPAH.

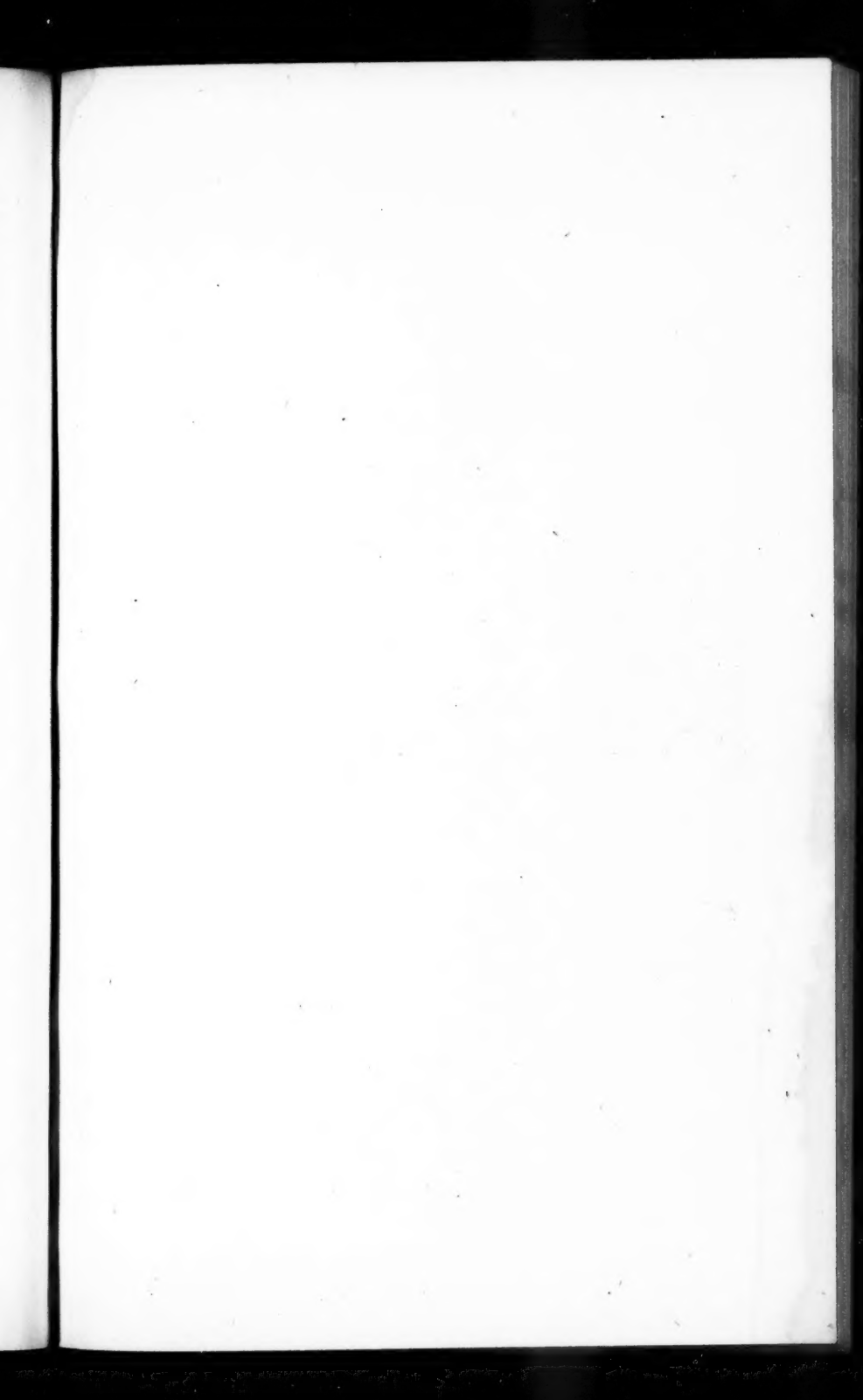
"The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent
one from another."

A BROAD gold band engraven
With word of Holy Writ—
A *ring*, the bond and token
Which love and prayer hath lit.
When absent from each other
O'er mountain, vale, and sea,
The Lord, who guarded Israel,
Keep watch 'tween me and thee.

Through days of light and gladness,
Through days of love and life,
Through smiles, and joy, and sunshine,
Through days with beauty rife :
When absent from each other,
O'er mountain, vale, and sea,
The Lord of love and gladness
Keep watch 'tween me and thee.

Through days of doubt and darkness,
In fear and trembling breath ;
Through mists of sin and sorrow
In tears, and grief, and death,—
The Lord of life and glory,
The King of earth and sea,
The Lord, who guarded Israel,
Keep watch 'tween me and thee.

A. E. G.





M. ELLIS EDWARDS.

WHAT PRISCILLA PEYTON HAD TO TELL.

R. AND B. SAILOR.